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SEPTEMBER 1997

# interZone

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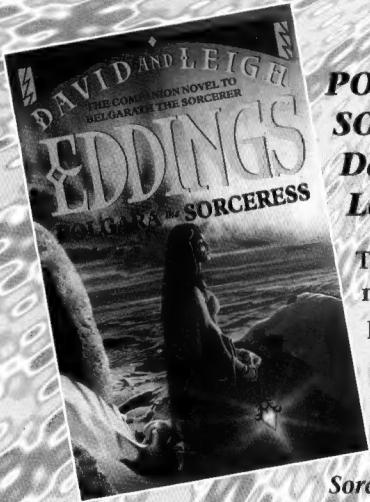
**Kim Newman & Eugene Byrne****Stephen Baxter****Nick Cornwell****Greg Egan****Liz Williams**

# This month's news



## Voyager no limits

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### **POLGARA THE SORCERESS** *David and Leigh Eddings*

The big news of the month has to be the publication of the long-awaited new novel from David and Leigh Eddings, *Polgara the Sorceress*. This is the

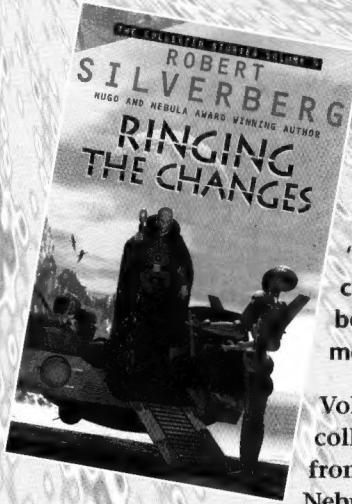
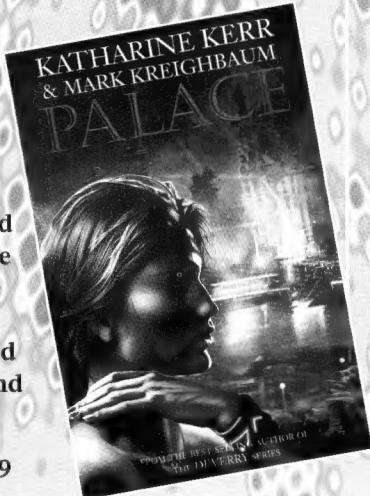
companion novel to the hugely popular *Belgarath the Sorcerer*, and finally, the full story of the Belgariad is revealed — the story of wizardry and politics, doom and evil, love and magic.

Published 10 July £17.99

### **PALACE** *Katharine Kerr and Mark Kreighbaum*

A deadly assassin is hired to murder two seemingly unconnected humans in the Pleasure Sect; however, one has disappeared and the other's secret past could mean that she is beyond his reach...

Published 21 July £5.99



### **RINGING THE CHANGES** *Robert Silverberg*

'Silverberg seems capable of amazements beyond those of mere mortals' *Washington Post*

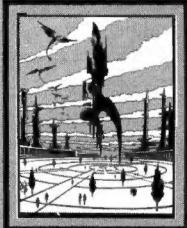
Volume 5 of the collected short stories from the Hugo and Nebula Award winning author combines thrilling originality and masterful storytelling.

Published 21 July £6.99

Finally, it's never too early to put an important date in your diary. Steve Baxter, the award-winning author of *Voyage*, will be signing copies of his new book, *Titan*, at Andromeda Bookshop on Saturday 16th August from midday, so come along if you're in the area and keep an eye out for further author events in the near future.

Alternatively, log on to our website for more information, news, reviews, interviews and excerpts from up-coming Voyager titles at: <http://www.harpercollins.co.uk/voyager>

These and other titles can be ordered by telephone. Access or Visa card holders call: London 0181 307 4052 or Glasgow 0141 306 3349.



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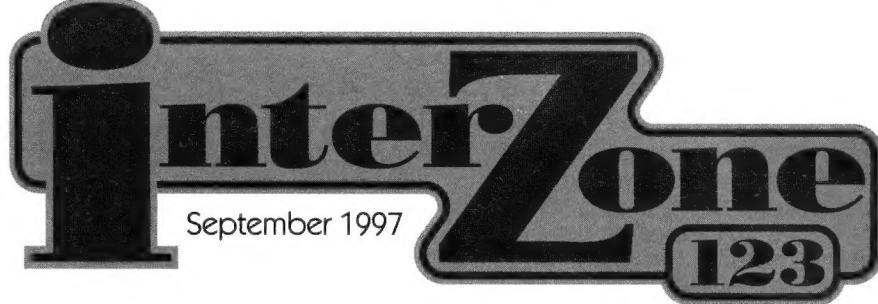
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**Submissions:**  
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September 1997

science fiction & fantasy

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**Cover illustration by Paul Young** for Paul J. McAuley's novel *Child of the River*,  
courtesy of Victor Gollancz Ltd.

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# + Interaction +

This note is a follow-up to my editorial ("Let's Hear it for the Mainstream") in *Interzone* 116 concerning science-fiction books by non-generic writers – which, I argued, have appeared constantly throughout the past hundred years and more, "from H. G. Wells and Jack London at the beginning of the century, through Olaf Stapledon, Aldous Huxley, C. S. Lewis and others in the century's first half, to the 'mainstreamers' of today such as Marge Piercy or Mary Doria Russell."

Bibliographer extraordinary Ian Covell, who prepares monthly lists of British-published sf/fantasy books for *Locus*, has kindly sent me electronic copies of his listings from January 1994 to June 1997, and in trawling through them I find records of another 16 UK-published sf books by mainstream writers (or, at any rate, by writers *presented* as mainstream) which were not sent to *Interzone* for review and which therefore did not show up in our "Books Received." Here they are, together with Ian Covell's original notes:

**Batchelor, John Calvin. *Father's Day*.** (Coronet, 0-340-61707-1, Aug. 1994, £4.99, 495pp, pb.) Sf novel: a 21st-century U.S. president faces a military coup.

**Booth, Martin. *Adrift on the Oceans of Mercy*.** (Simon & Schuster UK, 0-684-81651-2, Mar. 1996, £15.99, 292pp, hc). Literary sf novel: a contemporary Russian cosmonaut, marooned alone on a space station, recounts his final days.

**Booth, Martin. *Toys of Glass*.** (Simon & Schuster UK, 0-671-71915-7, Feb. 1995, £15.99, 282pp, hc). Sf novel: when a couple are unable to have children, a doctor secretly impregnates the woman with the sperm of a man from the Bronze Age. The boy born of this experiment has strange abilities that mark him out from the ordinary, growing stronger as he grows older; then his ancient dreams begin... A cool nightmare of a novel, neatly weaving its web of inevitable retribution.

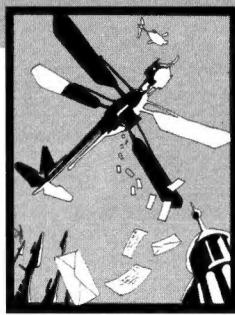
**Bowen, John. *No Retreat*.** (Sinclair-Stevenson, 1-85619-398-5, Jun. 1994, £14.99, 309pp, hc). Sf novel: Britain occupied by Nazis in an alternate 1990s.

**Faldbakken, Knut. *Sweetwater*.** (Peter Owen, 0-7206-0911-9, Mar. 1994, £15.95, 184pp, hc). Translated from the Norwegian by Joan Tate. Reprint (Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1976) literary sf novel, sequel to *Twilight Country*.

**Gordon, Jane. *Stepford Husbands*.** (Signet UK, 0-451-18321-5, Aug. 1996, £5.99, 287pp, pb). Satirical sf novel: wonder-drug makes men into "better" husbands – but do women want them?

**Ison, Graham. *Division*.** (Warner UK, 0-7515-1626-0, Sep. 1996, £5.99, 437pp, pb). Near-future political thriller: Britain explodes into rebellion and civil war after the government "succumbs" to the EC.

**Jensen, Liz. *Egg Dancing*.** (Bloomsbury, 0-7475-1997-8, Mar. 1995, £13.99, 281pp, hc). Literary sf: a thriller based on the battle between



fantasy and reality that develops when genetic engineers aim for the Perfect Baby near the Millennium. A first novel.

**LeClaire, Anne. *Sideshow*.** (Piatkus, 0-7499-0285-X, Feb. 1995, £15.99, 308pp, hc). Sf novel: Soleil Brown, a librarian, volunteers for a museum exhibit whose machine can read the mind of subjects and translate them into images for public view. She does not know the dreams will be monitored by the man she once loved – nor that they will somehow connect with the life of a girl of 60 years ago... a connection that strengthens, and begins to break through the barriers of time and space.

**Lorant, Emma. *Cradle of Secrets*.** (Headline, 0-7472-0845-X, Sep. 1994, £16.99, 310pp, hc). Sf novel of genetic engineering and pre-natal consciousness. Copyrighted by Tessa E. Warburg. First published in 1993 but not seen until now.

**Lord, Graham. *A Party to Die For*.** (Little, Brown UK, 0-316-88251-8, Feb. 1997, £16.99, 455pp, hc). Sf novel: as celebrities and those in power jockey to be first to enter the next Millennium, a comet heads for Earth. Time of Arrival: midnight of the 20th century. Gift: annihilation. The Millennium is mistakenly dated as 1 January 2000.

**Oudot, Susan. *Virtual Love*.** (Simon & Schuster UK, 0-684-81714-4, May 1997, £9.99, 454pp, tp). Literary sf novel: virtual-reality suits, tailored for feminists. (Note: Susan Oudot is married to sf novelist David Wingrove – DP.)

**Ransmayr, Christopher. *The Dog King*.** (Chatto & Windus, 0-7011-6627-4, Jun. 1997, £15.99, 355pp, hc). Translated by John E. Woods from the original German (Fischer Verlag, 1995, as *Morbus Kitahara*). Alternate-history novel of post-WW2 Germany forced to revert to a pre-industrial existence.

**Roberts, Andrew. *The Aachen Memorandum*.** (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 0-297-81619-5, Oct. 1995, £15.99, 280pp, hc). Sf novel: a dystopian satire set in a European super-state of 2045.

**Watts, Nigel. *Twenty Twenty*.** (Sceptre, 0-340-61726-8, Apr. 1995, £16.99, 249pp, hc). Sf novel: 2020, and the intersecting stories of an aging writer in Canada, infected with a deadly virus, and a young couple in California whose work on Virtually-Realizing the world of a vanished tribe finally points them towards the frozen wastes of Canada.

**Wilson, Chris. *The Wurd*.** (Flamingo, 0-00-224310-5, Sep. 1995, £14.99, 258pp, hc). Satire: on a spring evening in the Stone Age, Gob, the first narrator, tells the history of mankind.

It sometimes seems that publishers try to keep such books secret from us (there's no money in science fiction, they think), so I feel we ought to keep tabs on them. Brief reviews, or comments on, any of these books would be welcomed from readers.

David Pringle

# + Interaction +

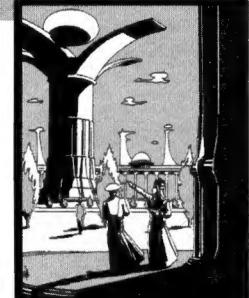
Dear Editors:

I read with interest Richard Scott Robinson's letter in *Interzone* 121 and felt that there might be something Mr Robinson was missing. How we choose to define sf is surely moot (there have been many interpretations of the form in the pages of *Interaction* alone) but it would seem essential that we keep an open mind. Like any genre, sf changes. It is fair enough that Mr Robinson finds much of sf "escapist and unconvincing," but disapproving of *Blade Runner* (for example) because of the proximity of its supposed timescale makes me believe that Mr Robinson might just have missed a point. He should not have been affronted that a date so close to our own was mentioned; no one honestly believes that such developments will happen so soon. In the same way that the ancient art of the pastoral really refers to town and city life, so science fiction really refers to contemporary existence. One branch of sf is undoubtedly the satirical, and the *Blade Runner* movie, as well as Dick's original novel *Do Androids Dream of*

*Electric Sheep?*, are examples of this. Sf is meant to be taken seriously, but it is not necessarily meant to be believed: it is a warped mirror held up in front of life.

The space travel that Mr Robinson despises might constitute an "escapist ideal," but my second point might be, what is wrong with escapism? Surely the fact that we need something to be escaping from is relevant here. Space travel is extrapolative, certainly, and the notion of hyperspace might be laughable, but the magic-realist writers (for example) take liberties with "real life": would Mr Robinson regard this entire genre as rubbish too?

I enjoy what Mr Robinson calls "real science fiction" too, and, for the record, I am not a big fan of *Star Trek* either. What a boring world (an sf nightmare



world, no less) it would be if we all enjoyed everything. All I would hope to stress is that there is room for everybody in the genre. Science fiction celebrates the power of the imagination, and if we are to ghettoize sub-genres we must ensure that we do so for valid reasons.

**David Mathew**  
Dunstable, Beds.

Dear Editors:

In a recent *Interzone* (issue 120, page 56), you make a note to a reviewer that one would not expect American readers to recognize the names of Jet Morgan or Modesty Blaise. The former, yes (I vaguely associate the name Jet Morgan as a British sf comic-strip character, but I'm not sure I've ever seen such, and few Americans, even sf fans, would do better); but Modesty Blaise is reasonably well known over here – all (I think) of the books by Peter O'Donnell have appeared in America in hardback and most or all in paperback as well. While the character doesn't command the following here that she does in the UK, she is certainly a name that most detective-fiction or popular-culture fans here would recognize.

**Denny Lien**  
Minneapolis

**Editor:** Short entries on both characters appear in my book *Imaginary People: A Who's Who of Fictional Characters* (second edition, Scolar Press, 1996). *Jet Morgan* was the spaceman hero of the three very popular *Journey Into Space* BBC radio serials (1953-55) written by Charles Chilton. He later appeared in a newspaper comic strip, and in script novelizations by Chilton (Pan Books). *Modesty Blaise* is likely to be the better-known character worldwide, as – in addition to O'Donnell's comic strip (syndicated around the world) and the associated novels – she appeared in a film (1966; directed by Joseph Losey) where she was played by the glamorous Italian actress Monica Vitti.

Dear Editors:

Since I have recently become a regular *Interzone* reader and hope, one day, to contribute to the magazine I would like to voice my views, if I may. The following letter takes the form of a reader's opinion, a complaint, a book review (although I am by no means a professional reviewer) and a tribute to my heroes.

I adore science fiction and fantasy and all permutations thereof but I have a particular love: the *Red Dwarf* novels. In early 1992 (and yes, before I even saw a single episode of the popular TV series) I read a science-fiction omnibus comprising *Red Dwarf* and *Better Than Life* by screenwriters Rob Grant and Doug Naylor. I shall not forget the book because I had such doubts about purchasing it; novelizations of SF comedy shows generally leave a lot to be desired. Naturally then, it came as a total surprise to me to discover that it was, far and away, the best book I

had ever read. You all know the story: a slob, a hugely insecure mechanoid, a creature evolved from cats and a dead man battle through the space-time continuum with the increasing suspicion that they will never taste a really good curry ever again. Undoubtedly hilarious, scientifically clever and, at times, truly touching. In 1995, however, the partnership split and Doug Naylor penned the third novel on his own. *Last Human* shot in at number 45 in Alex Hamilton's annual list of UK paperback bestsellers – a total of 204,666 copies sold. This made Doug the UK's second most popular sf author; second only, in fact, to Mr Pratchett himself. So why, may I ask, was *Last Human* not even reviewed in *Interzone*? David Langford mentioned in *IZ* 119 that *Backwards* by Rob Grant, the fourth novel in the sequence (see my review below) was also the #2 sf book of the year. Don't you think it's time the most popular sf comedy series in the country received some well-deserved recognition? I have included a review of *Backwards* at the end of this letter.

Many thanks for your attention. I think *Interzone* is a truly brilliant magazine, the best of its kind. It is my ambition to have a story published by *IZ*, hopefully while I am still 18 – although I must admit I'm finding it increasingly difficult to struggle against the established names like Greg Egan and Eric Brown.

**David Lee Stone**  
Ramsgate, Kent

#### **David Lee Stone's Review of *Backwards* by Rob Grant**

I sat down to read this novel with a fairly open mind. Following the misadventures of the increasingly inept Jupiter Mining Corporation Crew through *Red Dwarf* (1989) and *Better Than Life* (1990) had been, on the whole, thoroughly enjoyable and although *Last Human* (1995) was definitely competent I must admit feeling incredibly disappointed at the lack of humour in the latter. I remember once reading that Rob Grant and Doug Naylor (combined authors of the first two books) were comedian and science-fiction enthusiast respectively. I recall wondering which was which. As the first two novels excelled in both sf and comedy I was surprised to discover that Naylor had decided to pen the third in the series by himself. *Last Human* was filled with sf brilliance but contained little humour and seemed closer to being straight, hard-core sf. The new book, *Backwards* by Rob Grant (Penguin, £5.99), is much better, containing an equal measure of both sf and comedy – enough to delight *Red Dwarf* fans and entice new readers aplenty. This one begins in a backwards reality (hence the title) and continues where *Better Than Life* left off. Dave Lister is marooned in the reverse universe with only his ever-shrinking manhood for company. Some of the jokes are simply laugh-out-loud funny and, after all,

who could resist a novel where one of the central protagonists is a bitter and twisted robot called M'Aiden Ty-One?

Dear Editors:

A belated contribution, if I may, to the debate on the relative merits of *Space: Above and Beyond* and *Dark Skies*.

There is no mystery as to why *Dark Skies* is so popular, and it has nothing to do with script quality or production values – both of which I find banal. *Dark Skies* is a nostalgia trip. Other series have made capital out of interleaving clips from the Sixties with contemporary work – how many versions of events on the Grassy Knoll in Dallas have we now had, for pity's sake?

There are enough Baby Boomers around to make this a Safe Bet for film-makers. OK, wallow – but don't pretend that the "coherence" of the series is what does it for you.

I suppose I should declare, at this point, my own fondness for *Space: Above and Beyond*. I just like to see women getting to play with big guns, wearing fatigues (even if they are designer-tailored) and getting to roll around in the mud like the boys do. Where can I join up?

A question for your letter writers: why are all your letters so long? Didn't anyone every mention to you that brevity is the soul of wit?

PS: Great magazine. Great stories, great reviews.

**Judi Moore**  
Milton Keynes, Bucks.

Dear Editors:

I can provide a small amount of information to Louise Dade (*Interzone* 121, page 5) on the subject of *Murder In Space*, as I made a note of it in my diary.

As I recall, the second part was only about ten or fifteen minutes long, and dealt with the remaining crew returning to Earth, whereupon the Captain (who I believe was Braddock) was arrested and the solution revealed. Though I don't remember all the details, I wrote down that Olga was murdered by Steiner (the clue being white threads left by his scarf, if memory serves), Sterling by Olga, Steiner by Braddock (because he knew Steiner was a murderer and considered himself to be "judge, jury and executioner" on the ship) and Kalsinov by the KGB (a bomb, I think). Sadly I can't remember any more details on motives or methods.

The second part was transmitted on 15 September 1985, and followed by some kind of game show to find which contestant had won the prize, a rather tacky end – other than that I remember it as being quite well made, but it was twelve years ago and I wasn't necessarily very critically astute at the time. To the best of my knowledge there was no sequel to the book, presumably because there was so little to add. I hope this rather patchy information is of some use.

**Neil Hudson**  
Norwich

**T**he conceptory was non-sentient software, as ancient as Konishi polis itself. Its main purpose was to enable the citizens of the polis to create offspring: a child of one parent, or two, or 20 – formed partly in their own image, partly according to their wishes, and partly by chance. Sporadically, though, every teratau or so, the conceptory created a citizen with no parents at all.

In Konishi, every home-born citizen was grown from a mind seed, a string of instruction codes like a digital genome. The first mind seeds had been translated from DNA nine centuries before, when the polis founders had invented the Shaper programming language to re-create the essential processes of neuroembryology in software. But any such translation was necessarily imperfect, glossing over the biochemical details in favour of broad, functional equivalence, and the full diversity of the flesher genome could not be brought through intact. Starting from a diminished trait pool, with the old DNA-based maps rendered obsolete, it was crucial for the conceptory to chart the consequences of new variations to the mind seed. To eschew all change would be to risk stagnation; to embrace it recklessly would be to endanger the sanity of every child.

The Konishi mind seed was divided into a billion *fields*: short segments, six bits long, each containing a simple instruction code. Sequences of a few dozen instructions comprised *shapers*: the basic subprogrammes employed during psychogenesis. The effects of untried mutations on 15 million interacting shapers could rarely be predicted in advance; in most cases, the only reliable method would have been to perform every computation that the altered seed itself would have performed... which was no different from going ahead and growing the seed, creating the mind, predicting nothing.

The conceptrory's accumulated knowledge of its craft took the form of a collection of annotated maps of the Konishi mind seed. The highest-level maps were elaborate, multi-dimensional structures, dwarfing the seed itself by orders of magnitude. But there was one sim-

ple map which the citizens of Konishi had used to gauge the conceptry's progress over the centuries; it showed the billion fields as lines of latitude, and the 64 possible instruction codes as meridians. Any individual seed could be thought of as a path which zig-zagged down the map from top to bottom, singling out an instruction code for every field along the way.

Where it was known that only one code could lead to successful psychogenesis, every route on the map converged on a lone island or a narrow isthmus, ochre against ocean blue. These *infrastructure fields* built the basic mental architecture every citizen had in common, shaping both the mind's overarching design and the fine details of vital subsystems.

Elsewhere, the map recorded a spread of possibilities: a broad landmass, or a scattered archipelago. *Trait fields* offered a selection of codes, each with a known effect on the mind's detailed structure, with variations ranging from polar extremes of innate temperament or aesthetics down to minute differences in neural architecture less significant than the creases on a flesher's palm. They appeared in shades of green as wildly contrasting or as flatly indistinguishable as the traits themselves.

The remaining fields – where no changes to the seed had yet been tested, and no predictions could be made – were classified as *indeterminate*. Here, the one tried code, the known landmark, was shown as grey against white: a mountain peak protruding through a band of clouds which concealed everything to the east or west of it. No more detail could be resolved from afar; whatever lay beneath the clouds could only be discovered firsthand.

Whenever the conceptory created an orphan, it set all the benignly mutable trait fields to

valid codes chosen at random, since there were no parents to mimic or please. Then it selected a thousand indeterminate fields, and treated them in much the same fashion: throwing a thousand quantum dice to choose a random path through *terra incognita*. Every orphan was an explorer, sent to map uncharted territory.

And every orphan was the uncharted territory itself.

Greg Egan

The conceptory placed the new orphan seed in the middle of the womb's memory, a single strand of information suspended in a vacuum of zeroes. The seed meant nothing to itself; alone, it might as well have been the last stream of Morse, fleeing through the void past a distant star. But the womb was a virtual machine designed to execute the seed's instructions, and a dozen more layers of software led down to the polis itself, a lattice of flickering molecular switches. A sequence of bits, a string of passive data, could do nothing, change nothing – but in the womb, the seed's meaning fell into perfect alignment with all the immutable rules of all the levels beneath it. Like a punched card fed into a Jacquard loom, it ceased to be an abstract message and became a part of the machine.

When the womb read the seed, the seed's first shaper caused the space around it to be filled with a simple pattern of data: a single, frozen numerical wave train, sculpted across the emptiness like a billion perfect ranks of sand dunes. This distinguished each point from its immediate neighbours further up or down the same slope – but each crest was still identical to every other crest, each trough the same as every other trough. The womb's memory was arranged as a space with three dimensions, and the numbers stored at each point implied a fourth. So these dunes were four-dimensional.

A second wave was added – running askew to the first, modulated with a slow steady rise – carving each ridge into a series of ascending mounds. Then a third, and a fourth, each successive wave enriching the pattern, complicating and fracturing its symmetries: defining directions, building up gradients, establishing a hierarchy of scales.

The 40th wave ploughed through an abstract topography bearing no trace of the crystalline regularity of its origins, with ridges and furrows as convoluted as the whorls of a fingerprint. Not every point had been rendered unique – but enough structure had been created to act as the framework for everything to come. So the seed gave instructions for a hundred copies of itself to be scattered across the freshly calibrated landscape.

In the second iteration, the womb read all of the replicated seeds – and at first, the instructions they issued were the same, everywhere. Then, one instruction called for the point where each seed was being read to jump forward along the bit string to the next field adjacent to a certain pattern in the surrounding data: a sequence of ridges with a certain shape, distinctive but not unique. Since each seed was embedded in different terrain, each local version of this landmark was situated differently, and the womb began reading instructions from a different part of every seed. The seeds themselves were all still identical, but each one could now unleash a different set of shapers on the space around it, preparing the foundations for a different specialized region of the psychoblast, the embryonic mind.

The technique was an ancient one: a budding flower's nondescript stem cells followed a self-laid pattern of chemical cues to differentiate into sepals or petals, stamens or carpels; an insect pupa doused itself with a protein gradient which triggered, at different doses, the different cascades of gene activity needed to sculpt abdomen, thorax or head. Konishi's digital version

skimmed off the essence of the process: divide up space by marking it distinctively, then let the local markings inflect the unwinding of all further instructions, switching specialized subprogrammes on and off – subprogrammes which in turn would repeat the whole cycle on ever finer scales, gradually transforming the first rough-hewn structures into miracles of filigreed precision.

By the eighth iteration, the womb's memory contained a hundred trillion copies of the mind seed; no more would be required. Most continued to carve new detail into the landscape around them – but some gave up on shapers altogether, and started running *shriekers*: brief loops of instructions which fed streams of pulses into the primitive networks which had grown up between the seeds. The tracks of these networks were just the highest ridges the shapers had built, and the pulses were tiny arrowheads, one and two steps higher. The shapers had worked in four dimensions, so the networks themselves were three-dimensional. The womb breathed life into these conventions, making the pulses race along the tracks like a quadrillion cars shuttling between the trillion junctions of a ten-thousand-tiered monorail.

Some shriekers sent out metronomic bit-streams; others produced pseudo-random stutters. The pulses flowed through the mazes of construction where the networks were still being formed – where almost every track was still connected to every other, because no decision to prune had yet been made. Woken by the traffic, new shapers started up and began to disassemble the excess junctions, preserving only those where a sufficient number of pulses were arriving simultaneously – choosing, out of all the countless alternatives, pathways which could operate in synchrony. There were dead ends in the networks-in-progress, too – but if they were travelled often enough, other shapers noticed, and constructed extensions. It didn't matter that these first streams of data were meaningless; any kind of signal was enough to help whittle the lowest-level machinery of thought into existence.

In many polises, new citizens weren't grown at all; they were assembled directly from generic subsystems. But the Konishi method provided a certain quasi-biological robustness, a certain seamlessness. Systems grown together, interacting even as they were being formed, resolved most kinds of potential mismatch themselves, with no need for an external mind-builder to fine-tune all the finished components to ensure that they didn't clash.

Amidst all this organic plasticity and compromise, though, the infrastructure fields could still stake out territory for a few standardized subsystems, identical from citizen to citizen. Two of these were channels for incoming data – one for *gestalt*, and one for *linear*, the two primary modalities of all Konishi citizens, distant descendants of vision and hearing. By the orphan's 200th iteration, the channels themselves were fully formed, but the inner structures to which they fed their data, the networks for classifying and making sense of it, were still undeveloped, still unrehearsed.

Konishi polis itself was buried 200 metres beneath the Siberian tundra, but via fibre and satellite links the input channels could bring in data from any forum in the Coalition of Polises, from probes orbiting every planet and moon in the solar system, from drones wan-

dering the forests and oceans of Earth, from ten million kinds of scape or abstract sensorium. The first problem of perception was learning how to choose from this superabundance.

In the orphan psychoblast, the half-formed navigator wired to the controls of the input channels began issuing a stream of requests for information. The first few thousand requests yielded nothing but a monotonous stream of error codes; they were incorrectly formed, or referred to non-existent sources of data. But every psychoblast was innately biased towards finding the polis library (if not, it would have taken millennia) and the navigator kept trying until it hit on a valid address, and data flooded through the channels: a gestalt image of a lion, accompanied by the linear word for the animal.

The navigator instantly abandoned trial and error and went into a spasm of repetition, summoning the same frozen image of the lion again and again. This continued until even the crudest of its embryonic change-discriminators finally stopped firing, and it drifted back towards experimentation.

Gradually, a half-sensible compromise evolved between the orphan's two kinds of proto-curiosity: the drive to seek out novelty, and the drive to seek out recurring patterns. It browsed the library, learning how to bring in streams of connected information – sequential images of recorded motion, and then more abstract chains of cross-references – understanding nothing, but wired to reinforce its own behaviour when it struck the right balance between coherence and change.

Images and sounds, symbols and equations, flooded through the orphan's classifying networks, leaving behind, not the fine details – not the spacesuited figure standing on grey-and-white rock against a pitch black sky; not the calm, naked figure disintegrating beneath a grey swarm of nanomachines – but an imprint of the simplest regularities, the most common associations. The networks discovered the circle/sphere: in images of the sun and planets, in iris and pupil, in fallen fruit, in a thousand different artworks, artefacts and mathematical diagrams. They discovered the linear word for "person," and bound it tentatively both to the regularities which defined the gestalt icon for "citizen," and to the features they found in common among the many images of fleshers and gleisner robots.

By the 500th iteration, the categories extracted from the library's data had given rise to a horde of tiny subsystems in the input-classifying networks: ten thousand word-traps and image-traps, all poised and waiting to be sprung; ten thousand pattern-recognizing monomaniacs staring into the information stream, constantly alert for their own special targets.

These traps began to form connections with each other, using them at first just to share their judgements, to sway each other's decisions. If the trap for the image of a lion was triggered, then the traps for its linear name, for the kind of sounds other lions had been heard to make, for common features seen in their behaviour (licking cubs, pursuing antelope) all became hypersensitive. Sometimes the incoming data triggered a whole cluster of linked traps all at once, strengthening their mutual connections, but sometimes there was time for over-eager associate traps to start firing prematurely. *The lion shape has been recognized – and*

*though the word "lion" has not yet been detected, the "lion" word-trap is tentatively firing... and so are the traps for cub-licking and antelope-chasing.*

The orphan had begun to anticipate, to hold expectations.

By the thousandth iteration, the connections between the traps had developed into an elaborate network in its own right, and new structures had arisen in this network – *symbols* – which could be triggered by each other as easily as by any data from the input channels. The lion image-trap, on its own, had merely been a template held up to the world to be declared a match or a mismatch – a verdict without implications. The lion symbol could encode an unlimited web of implications – and that web could be tapped at any time, whether or not a lion was visible.

Mere recognition was giving way to the first faint hints of meaning.

The infrastructure fields had built the orphan standard output channels for linear and gestalt, but as yet the matching navigator, needed to address outgoing data to some specific destination in Konishi or beyond, remained inactive. By the two-thousandth iteration, symbols began to jostle for access to the output channels, regardless. They used their traps' templates to parrot the sound or image which each had learnt to recognize – and it didn't matter if they uttered the linear words "lion," "cub," "antelope" into a void, because the input and output channels were wired together, on the inside.

The orphan began to hear itself think.

Not the whole pandemonium; it couldn't give voice – or even gestalt – to everything at once. Out of the myriad associations every scene from the library evoked, only a few symbols at a time could gain control of the nascent language-production networks. And though birds were wheeling in the sky, and the grass was waving, and a cloud of dust and insects was rising up in the animals' wake – and more, much more... the symbols which won out before the whole scene vanished were:

"Lion chasing antelope."

Startled, the navigator cut off the flood of external data. The linear words cycled from channel to channel, distinct against the silence; the gestalt images summoned up the essence of the chase again and again, an idealized reconstruction shorn of all forgotten details.

Then the memory faded to black, and the navigator reached out to the library again.

The orphan's thoughts themselves never shrank to a single orderly progression – rather, symbols fired in ever richer and more elaborate cascades – but positive feedback sharpened the focus, and the mind resonated with its own strongest ideas. The orphan had learnt to single out one or two threads from the symbols' endless thousand-strand argument. It had learnt to narrate its own experience.

The orphan was almost half a megatau old, now. It had a vocabulary of 10,000 words, a short-term memory, expectations stretching several tau into the future, and a simple stream of consciousness. But it still had no idea that there was such a thing in the world as itself.

The conceptory mapped the developing mind after every iteration, scrupulously tracing the effects of the randomized indeterminate fields. A sentient observer

of the same information might have visualized a thousand delicate interlocking fractals, like tangled, feathery, zero-gee crystals, sending out ever-finer branches to criss-cross the womb as the fields were read and acted upon, and their influence diffused from network to network. The conceptory didn't visualize anything; it just processed the data, and reached its conclusions.

So far, the mutations appeared to have caused no harm. Every individual structure in the orphan's mind was functioning broadly as expected, and the traffic with the library, and other sampled data streams, showed no signs of incipient global pathologies.

If a psychoblast was found to be damaged, there was nothing in principle to stop the conceptory from reaching into the womb and repairing every last malformed structure, but the consequences could be as unpredictable as the consequences of growing the seed in the first place. Localized "surgery" sometimes introduced incompatibilities with the rest of the psychoblast, while alterations widespread and thorough enough to guarantee success could be self-defeating, effectively obliterating the original psychoblast and replacing it with an assembly of parts cloned from past healthy ones.

But there were risks, too, in doing nothing. Once a psychoblast became self-aware, it was granted citizenship, and intervention without consent became impossible. This was not a matter of mere custom or law; the principle was built into the deepest level of the polis. A citizen who spiralled down into insanity could spend teratau in a state of confusion and pain, with a mind too damaged to authorize help, or even to choose extinction. That was the price of autonomy: an inalienable right to madness and suffering, inseparable from the right to solitude and peace.

So the citizens of Konishi had programmed the conceptory to err on the side of caution. It continued to observe the orphan closely, ready to terminate psychogenesis at the first sign of dysfunction.

Not long after the five-thousandth iteration, the orphan's output navigator began to fire – and a tug-of-war began. The output navigator was wired to seek feedback, to address itself to someone or something that showed a response. But the input navigator had long since grown accustomed to confining itself to the polis library, a habit which had been powerfully rewarded. Both navigators were wired with a drive to bring each other into alignment, to connect to the same address, enabling the citizen to listen and speak in the same place – a useful conversational skill. But it meant that the orphan's chatter of speech and icons flowed straight back to the library, which completely ignored it.

Faced with this absolute indifference, the output navigator sent repressor signals into the change-discriminator networks, undermining the attraction of the library's mesmerizing show, bullying the input navigator out of its rut. Dancing a weird chaotic lockstep, the two navigators began hopping from scape to scape, polis to polis, planet to planet. Looking for someone to talk to.

They caught a thousand random glimpses of the physical world along the way: a radar image of a dust storm sweeping across the sea of dunes ringing the north-polar ice cap of Mars; the faint infrared plume of a small comet disintegrating in the atmosphere of

Uranus – an event that had taken place decades before, but lingered in the satellite's discriminating memory. They even chanced upon a realtime feed from a drone weaving its way across the East African savanna towards a pride of lions, but unlike the library's flowing images this vision seemed intractably frozen, and after a few tau they moved on.

When the orphan stumbled on the address for a Konishi forum, it saw a square paved with smooth rhombuses of mineral blues and greys, arranged in a pattern dense with elusive regularities but never quite repeating itself. A fountain sprayed liquid silver towards a cloud-streaked, burnt-orange sky; as each stream broke apart into mirrored droplets half-way up its arc, the shiny globules deformed into tiny winged piglets which flew around the fountain, braiding each others' flight paths and grunting cheerfully before diving back into the pool. Stone cloisters ringed the square, the inner side of the walkway a series of broad arches and elaborately decorated colonnades. Some of the arches had been given unusual twists – Eschered or Kleined, skewed through invisible extra dimensions.

The orphan had seen similar structures in the library, and knew the linear words for most of them; the scape itself was so unremarkable that the orphan said nothing about it at all. And the orphan had viewed thousands of scenes of moving, talking citizens, but it was acutely aware of a difference here, though it could not yet grasp clearly what it was. The gestalt images themselves mostly reminded it of icons it had seen before, or the stylized fleshers it had seen in representational art: far more diverse, and far more mercurial, than real fleshers could ever be. Their form was constrained not by physiology or physics, but only by the conventions of gestalt – the need to proclaim, beneath all inflections and subtleties, one primary meaning: *I am a citizen*.

The orphan addressed the forum: "People."

The linear conversations between the citizens were public, but muted – degraded in proportion to distance in the scape – and the orphan heard only an unchanging murmur.

It tried again. "People!"

The icon of the nearest citizen – a dazzling multi-hued form like a stained-glass statue, about two delta high – turned to face the orphan. An innate structure in the input navigator rotated the orphan's angle of view straight towards the icon. The output navigator, driven to follow it, made the orphan's own icon – now a crude, unconscious parody of the citizen's – turn the same way.

The citizen glinted blue and gold. Vis translucent face smiled, and ve said, "Hello, orphan."

*A response, at last!* The output navigator's feedback detector shut off its scream of boredom, damping down the restlessness which had powered the search. It flooded the mind with signals to repress any system which might intervene and drag it away from this precious find.

The orphan parroted: "Hello, orphan."

The citizen smiled again – "Yes, hello" – then turned back to vis friends.

"People! Hello!"

Nothing happened.

“Citizens! People!”

The group ignored the orphan. The feedback detector backtracked on its satisfaction rating, making the navigators restless again. Not restless enough to abandon the forum, but enough to move within it.

The orphan darted from place to place, crying out: “People! Hello!” It moved without momentum or inertia, gravity or friction, merely tweaking the least significant bits of the input navigator’s requests for data, which the scape interpreted as the position and angle of the orphan’s point-of-view. The matching bits from the output navigator determined where and how the orphan’s speech and icon were merged into the scape.

The navigators learnt to move close enough to the citizens to be easily heard. Some responded – “Hello, orphan” – before turning away. The orphan echoed their icons back at them: simplified or intricate, rococo or spartan, mock-biological, mock-artefactual, forms outlined with helices of luminous smoke, or filled with vivid hissing serpents, decorated with blazing fractal encrustations, or draped in textureless black – but always the same biped, the same ape-shape, as constant beneath the riot of variation as the letter A in a hundred mad monks’ illuminated manuscripts.

Gradually, the orphan’s input-classifying networks began to grasp the difference between the citizens in the forum and all the icons it had seen in the library. As well as the image, each icon here exuded a non-visual gestalt tag – a quality like a distinctive odour for a fleshier, though more localized, and much richer in possibilities. The orphan could make no sense of this new form of data, but now its infotrope – a late-developing structure which had grown as a second level over the simpler novelty and pattern detectors – began to respond to the deficit in understanding. It picked up the tenuous hint of a regularity – *every citizen’s icon, here, comes with a unique and unvarying tag* – and expressed its dissatisfaction. The orphan hadn’t previously bothered echoing the tag, but now, spurred on by the infotrope, it approached a group of three citizens and began to mimic one of them, tag and all. The reward was immediate.

The citizen exclaimed angrily, “Don’t do that, idiot!” “Hello!”

“No one will believe you if you claim to be me – least of all me. Understand? Now go away!” This citizen had metallic, pewter-grey skin. Ve flashed vis tag on and off for emphasis; the orphan did the same.

“No!” The citizen was now sending out a second tag, alongside the original. “See? I challenge you – and you can’t respond. So why bother lying?”

“Hello!”

“Go away!”

The orphan was riveted; this was the most attention it had ever received.

“Hello, citizen!”

The pewter face sagged, almost melting with exaggerated weariness. “Don’t you know who you are? Don’t you know your own *signature*?”

Another citizen said calmly, “It must be the new orphan – still in the womb. Your newest co-politan, Inoshiro. You ought to welcome it.”

This citizen was covered in short, golden-brown fur. The orphan said, “Lion.” It tried mimicking the new cit-

izen – and suddenly all three of them were laughing.

The third citizen said, “It wants to be you now, Gabriel.”

The first, pewter-skinned citizen said, “If it doesn’t know its own name, we should call it ‘idiot’.”

“Don’t be cruel. I could show you memories, little part-sibling.” The third citizen’s icon was a featureless black silhouette.

“Now it wants to be Blanca.”

The orphan started mimicking each citizen in turn. The three responded by chanting strange linear sounds which meant nothing – “Inoshiro! Gabriel! Blanca! Inoshiro! Gabriel! Blanca!” – just as the orphan sent out the gestalt images and tags.

Short-term pattern recognizers seized on the connection, and the orphan joined in the linear chant – and continued it for a while, when the others fell silent. But after a few repetitions the pattern grew stale.

The pewter-skinned citizen clasped vis hand to vis chest and said, “I’m Inoshiro.”

The golden-furred citizen clasped vis hand to vis chest and said, “I’m Gabriel.”

The black-silhouetted citizen gave vis hand a thin white outline to keep it from vanishing as ve moved it in front of vis trunk, and said, “I’m Blanca.”

The orphan mimicked each citizen once, speaking the linear word they’d spoken, aping their hand gesture. Symbols had formed for all three of them, binding their icons, complete with tags, and the linear words together – even though the tags and the linear words still connected to nothing else.

The citizen whose icon had made them all chant “Inoshiro” said, “So far so good. But how does it get a name of its own?”

The one with its tag bound to “Blanca” said, “Orphans name themselves.”

The orphan echoed, “Orphans name themselves.”

The citizen bound to “Gabriel” pointed to the one bound to “Inoshiro,” and said, “Ve is –?” The citizen bound to “Blanca” said “Inoshiro.”

Then the citizen bound to “Inoshiro” pointed back at ver and said “Ve is –?” This time, the citizen bound to “Blanca” replied, “Blanca.” The orphan joined in, pointing where the others pointed, guided by innate systems which helped make sense of the scape’s geometry, and completing the pattern easily even when no one else did.

Then the golden-furred citizen pointed at the orphan, and said: “Ve is –?”

The input navigator spun the orphan’s angle of view, trying to see what the citizen was pointing at. When it found nothing behind the orphan, it moved its point of view backwards, closer to the golden-furred citizen – momentarily breaking step with the output navigator.

Suddenly, the orphan *saw* the icon it was projecting itself – a crude amalgam of the three citizens’ icons, all black fur and yellow metal – not just as the usual faint mental image from the cross-connected channels, but as a vivid scape-object beside the other three.

This was what the golden-furred citizen bound to “Gabriel” was pointing at.

The infotrope went wild. It couldn’t complete the unfinished regularity – it couldn’t answer the game’s question for this strange fourth citizen – but the hole in the pattern needed to be filled.

The orphan watched the fourth citizen change shape and colour, out there in the scape... changes perfectly mirroring its own random fidgeting: sometimes mimicking one of the other three citizens, sometimes simply playing with the possibilities of gestalt. This mesmerized the regularity detectors for a while, but it only made the infotrope more restless.

The infotrope combined and recombined all the factors at hand, and set a short-term goal: making the pewter-skinned "Inoshiro" icon change, the way the fourth citizen's icon was changing. This triggered a faint anticipatory firing of the relevant symbols, a mental image of the desired event. But though the image of a wiggling, pulsating citizen-icon easily won control of the gestalt output channel, it wasn't the "Inoshiro" icon that changed – just the fourth citizen's icon, as before.

The input navigator drifted of its own accord back into the same location as the output navigator, and the fourth citizen abruptly vanished. The infotrope pushed the navigators apart again; the fourth citizen reappeared.

The "Inoshiro" citizen said, "What's it doing?" The "Blanca" citizen replied, "Just watch, and be patient. You might learn something."

A new symbol was already forming, a representation of the strange fourth citizen – the only one whose icon seemed bound by a mutual attraction to the orphan's viewpoint in the scape, and the only one whose actions the orphan could anticipate and control with such ease. So were all four citizens the same kind of thing – like all lions, all antelope, all circles... or not? The connections between the symbols remained tentative.

The "Inoshiro" citizen said, "I'm bored! Let someone else baby-sit it!" Ve danced around the group – taking turns imitating the "Blanca" and "Gabriel" icons, and reverting to vis original form. "What's my name? I don't know! What's my signature? I don't have one! I'm an orphan! I'm an orphan! I don't even know how I look!"

When the orphan perceived the "Inoshiro" citizen taking on the icons of the other two, it almost abandoned its whole classification scheme in confusion. The "Inoshiro" citizen was behaving more like the fourth citizen, now – though vis actions still didn't coincide with the orphan's intentions.

The orphan's symbol for the fourth citizen kept track of that citizen's appearance and location in the scape, but it was also beginning to distil the essence of the orphan's own mental images and short-term goals, creating a summary of all the aspects of the orphan's state of mind which seemed to have some connection to the fourth citizen's behaviour. Few symbols possessed sharply defined boundaries, though; most were as permeable and promiscuous as plasmid-swapping bacteria. The symbol for the "Inoshiro" citizen copied some of the state-of-mind structures from the symbol for the fourth citizen, and began trying them out for itself.

At first, the ability to represent highly summarized "mental images" and "goals" was no help at all – because it was still linked to the orphan's state of mind. The "Inoshiro" symbol's blindly cloned machinery kept predicting that the "Inoshiro" citizen would behave according to the orphan's own plans... and that never happened. In the face of this repeated failure, the links soon withered – and the tiny, crude model-of-a-mind left inside the "Inoshiro" symbol was set free to find the

"Inoshiro" state-of-mind that best matched the citizen's actual behaviour.

The symbol tried out different connections, different theories, hunting for the one that made most sense... and the orphan suddenly grasped the fact that the "Inoshiro" citizen had been imitating *the fourth citizen*.

The infotrope seized on this revelation – and tried to make the fourth citizen mimic the "Inoshiro" citizen back.

The fourth citizen proclaimed, "I'm an orphan! I'm an orphan! I don't even know how I look!"

The "Gabriel" citizen pointed at the fourth citizen and said, "Ve is an orphan!" The "Inoshiro" citizen agreed wearily, "Ve is an orphan. But why does ve have to be this slow!"

Inspired – driven by the infotrope – the orphan tried playing the "Ve is –?" game again, this time using the response "an orphan" for the fourth citizen. The others confirmed the choice, and soon the words were bound to the symbol for the fourth citizen.

When the orphan's three friends left the scape, the fourth citizen remained. But the fourth citizen had exhausted vis ability to offer interesting surprises, so after pestering some of the other citizens to no avail, the orphan returned to the library.

The input navigator had learnt the simplest indexing scheme used by the library, and when the infotrope hunted for ways to tie up the loose ends in the patterns half-formed in the scape, it succeeded in driving the input navigator to locations in the library which referred to the four citizens' mysterious linear words: Inoshiro, Gabriel, Blanca, and Orphan. There were streams of data indexed by each of these words, though none seemed to connect to the citizens themselves. The orphan saw so many images of fleshers, often with wings, associated with the word "Gabriel" that it built a whole symbol out of the regularities it found, but the new symbol barely overlapped with that of the golden-furred citizen.

The orphan drifted away from its infotrope-driven search many times; old addresses in the library, etched in memory, tugged at the input navigator. Once, viewing a scene of a grimy fleshed child holding up an empty wooden bowl, the orphan grew bored and veered back towards more familiar territory. Halfway there, it came across a scene of an adult fleshed crouching beside a bewildered lion cub and lifting it into vis arms.

A lioness lay on the ground behind them, motionless and bloody. The fleshed stroked the head of the cub. "Poor little Yatima."

Something in the scene transfixed the orphan. It whispered to the library, "Yatima. Yatima." It had never heard the word before, but the sound of it resonated deeply.

The lion cub mewed. The fleshed crooned, "My poor little orphan."

The orphan moved between the library and the scape with the orange sky and the flying-pig fountain. Sometimes its three friends were there, or other citizens would play with it for a while; sometimes there was only the fourth citizen.

The fourth citizen rarely appeared the same from

visit to visit – ve tended to resemble the most striking image the orphan had seen in the library in the preceding few kilotau – but ve was still easy to identify: ve was the one who only became visible when the two navigators moved apart. Every time the orphan arrived in the scape, it stepped back from itself and checked out the fourth citizen. Sometimes it adjusted the icon, bringing it closer to a specific memory, or fine-tuning it according to the aesthetic preferences of the input classifying networks – biases first carved out by a few dozen trait fields, then deepened or silted-up by the subsequent data stream. Sometimes the orphan mimicked the flesher it had seen picking up the lion cub: tall and slender, with deep black skin and brown eyes, dressed in a purple robe.

And once, when the citizen bound to “Inoshiro” said with mock sorrow, “Poor little orphan, you still don’t have a name,” the orphan remembered the scene, and responded, “Poor little Yatima.”

The golden-furred citizen said, “I think it does now.”

From then on, they all called the fourth citizen “Yatima.” They said it so many times, making such a fuss about it, that the orphan soon bound it to the symbol as strongly as “Orphan.”

The orphan watched the citizen bound to “Inoshiro” chanting triumphantly at the fourth citizen: “Yatima! Yatima! Ha ha ha! I’ve got *five* parents, and *five* part-siblings, and I’ll *always* be older than you!”

The orphan made the fourth citizen respond, “Inoshiro! Inoshiro! Ha ha ha!”

But it couldn’t think what to say next.

Blanca said, “The gleisners are trimming an asteroid – right now, in realtime. Do you want to come see? Inoshiro’s there, Gabriel’s there. Just follow me!”

Blanca’s icon put out a strange new tag, and then abruptly vanished. The forum was almost empty; there were a few regulars near the fountain, who the orphan knew would be unresponsive, and there was the fourth citizen, as always.

Blanca reappeared. “What is it? You don’t know how to follow me, or you don’t want to come?” The orphan’s language analysis networks had begun fine-tuning the universal grammar they encoded, rapidly homing in on the conventions of linear. Words were becoming more than isolated triggers for symbols, each with a single, fixed meaning; the subtleties of order, context and inflection were beginning to modulate the symbols’ cascades of interpretation. *This was a request to know what the fourth citizen wanted.*

“Play with me!” The orphan had learnt to call the fourth citizen “I” or “me” rather than “Yatima,” but that was just grammar, not self-awareness.

“I want to watch the trimming, Yatima.”

“No! Play with me!” The orphan weaved around ve excitedly, projecting fragments of recent memories: Blanca creating shared scape objects – spinning numbered blocks, and brightly coloured bouncing balls – and teaching the orphan how to interact with them.

“Okay, okay! Here’s a new game. I just hope you’re a fast learner.”

Blanca emitted another extra tag – the same general flavour as before, though not identical – then vanished again... only to reappear immediately, a few hundred

delta away across the scape. The orphan spotted ve easily, and followed at once.

Blanca jumped again. And again. Each time, ve sent out the new flavour of tag, with a slight variation, before vanishing. Just as the orphan was starting to find the game dull, Blanca began to stay out of the scape for a fraction of a tau before reappearing – and the orphan spent the time trying to guess where ve’d materialize next, hoping to get to the chosen spot first.

There seemed to be no pattern to it, though; Blanca’s solid shadow jumped around the forum at random, anywhere from the cloisters to the fountain, and the orphan’s guesses all failed. It was frustrating... but Blanca’s games had usually turned out to possess some kind of subtle order in the past, so the infotrope persisted, combining and recombining existing pattern detectors into new coalitions, hunting for a way to make sense of the problem.

*The tags!* When the infotrope compared the memory of the raw gestalt data for the tags Blanca was sending with the address the innate geometry networks computed when the orphan caught sight of ver a moment later, parts of the two sequences matched up, almost precisely. Again and again. The infotrope bound the two sources of information together – recognizing them as two means of learning the same thing – and the orphan began jumping across the scape without waiting to see where Blanca reappeared.

The first time, their icons overlapped, and the orphan had to back away before it saw that Blanca really was there, confirming the success the infotrope had already brashly claimed. The second time, the orphan instinctively compensated, varying the tag address slightly to keep from colliding, as it had learnt to do when pursuing Blanca by sight. The third time, the orphan beat ver to the destination.

“I win!”

“Well done, Yatima! You followed me!”

“I followed you!”

“Shall we go and see the trimming now? With Inoshiro and Gabriel?”

“Gabriel!”

“I’ll take that as a yes.”

Blanca jumped, the orphan followed – and the cloistered square dissolved into a billion stars.

The orphan examined the strange new scape. Between them, the stars shone in almost every frequency from kilometre-long radio waves to high-energy gamma rays. The “colour space” of gestalt could be extended indefinitely, and the orphan had chanced on a few astronomical images in the library which employed a similar palette, but most terrestrial scenes and most scapes never went beyond infrared and ultraviolet. Even the satellite views of planetary surfaces seemed drab and muted in comparison; the planets were too cold to blaze across the spectrum like this. There were hints of subtle order in the riot of colour – series of emission and absorption lines, smooth contours of thermal radiation – but the infotrope, dazzled, gave in to the overload and simply let the data flow through it; analysis would have to wait for a thousand more clues. The stars were geometrically featureless – point-like, distant, their scape addresses impossible to compute – but the orphan had a fleeting mental image of

the act of moving towards them, and imagined, for an instant, the possibility of seeing them up close.

The orphan spotted a cluster of citizens nearby, and once it shifted its attention from the backdrop of stars it began to notice dozens of small groups scattered around the scape. Some of their icons reflected the ambient radiation, but most were simply visible by decree, making no pretence of interacting with the starlight.

Inoshiro said, "Why did you have to bring *that* along?"

As the orphan turned towards ver, it caught sight of a star far brighter than all the rest, much smaller than the familiar sight in the Earth's sky, but unfiltered by the usual blanket of gases and dust.

"The sun?"

Gabriel said, "Yes, that's the sun." The golden-furred citizen floated beside Blanca, who was visible as sharply as ever, darker even than the cool thin background radiation between the stars.

Inoshiro whined, "Why did you bring Yatima? It's too young! It won't understand anything!"

Blanca said, "Just ignore ver, Yatima."

*Yatima! Yatima!* The orphan knew exactly where Yatima was, and what ve looked like, without any need to part the navigators and check. The fourth citizen's icon had stabilized as the tall fleshier in the purple robe who'd adopted the lion cub, in the library.

Inoshiro addressed the orphan. "Don't worry Yatima, I'll try to explain it to you. If the gleisners didn't trim this asteroid, then in 300,000 years – 10,000 teratau – there'd be a chance it might hit the Earth. And the sooner they trim it, the less energy it takes. But they couldn't do it before, because the equations are chaotic, so they couldn't model the approach well enough until now."

The orphan understood none of this. "Blanca wanted me to see the trimming! But I wanted to play a new game!"

Inoshiro laughed. "So what did ve do? Kidnap you?"

"I followed ver and ve jumped and jumped... and I *followed ver!*" The orphan made a few short jumps around the three of them, trying to illustrate the point, though it didn't really convey the business of leaping right out of one scape into another.

Inoshiro said, "Ssh. Here it comes."

The orphan followed vis gaze to an irregular lump of rock in the distance – lit by the sun, one half in deep shadow – moving swiftly and steadily towards the loose assembly of citizens. The scape software decorated the asteroid's image with gestalt tags packed with information about its chemical composition, its mass, its spin, its orbital parameters; the orphan recognized some of these flavours from the library, but it had no real grasp yet of what they meant.

"One slip of the laser, and the fleshers die in pain!" Inoshiro's pewter eyes gleamed.

Blanca said drily, "And just 300 millennia to try again."

Inoshiro turned to the orphan and added reassuringly, "But we'd be all right. Even if it wiped out Konishi on Earth, we're backed-up all over the solar system."

The asteroid was close enough now for the orphan to

compute its scape address and its size. It was still some hundred times more distant than the farthest citizen, but it was approaching rapidly. The waiting spectators were arranged in a roughly spherical shell, about ten times as large as the asteroid itself – and the orphan could see at once that if it maintained its trajectory, the asteroid would pass right through the centre of that imaginary sphere.

Everyone was watching the rock intently. The orphan wondered what kind of game this was; a generic symbol had formed which encompassed all the strangers in the scape, as well as the orphan's three friends, and this symbol had inherited the fourth citizen's property of *holding beliefs about objects* which had proved so useful for predicting its behaviour. *Maybe people were waiting to see if the rock would suddenly jump at random, like Blanca had jumped?* The orphan believed they were mistaken; the rock was not a citizen, it wouldn't play games with them.

The orphan wanted everyone to know about the rock's simple trajectory. It checked its extrapolation one more time, but nothing had changed; the bearing and speed were as constant as ever. The orphan lacked the words to explain this to the crowd... but maybe they could learn things by watching the fourth citizen, the way the fourth citizen had learnt things from Blanca.

The orphan jumped across the scape, straight into the path of the asteroid. A quarter of the sky became pocked and grey, an irregular hillock on the sunward side casting a band of deep shadow across the approaching face. For an instant, the orphan was too startled to move – mesmerized by the scale, and the speed, and the awkward, purposeless grandeur of the thing – then it matched velocities with the rock, and led it back towards the crowd.

People began shouting excitedly, their words immune to the fictitious vacuum but degraded with distance by the scape, scrambled into a pulsating roar. The orphan turned away from the asteroid, and saw the nearest citizens waving and gesticulating.

The fourth citizen's symbol, plugged directly into the orphan's mind, had already concluded that the fourth citizen was tracing out the asteroid's path in order to change what the other citizens thought. So the orphan's model of the fourth citizen had acquired the property of *having beliefs about what other citizens believed...* and the symbols for Inoshiro, Blanca, Gabriel, and the crowd itself, snatched at this innovation to try it out for themselves.

As the orphan plunged into the spherical arena, it could hear people laughing and cheering. Everyone was watching the fourth citizen, though the orphan was finally beginning to suspect that no one had really needed to be shown the trajectory. As it looked back to check that the rock was still on course, a point on the hillock began to glow with intense infrared – and then erupted with light a thousand times brighter than the sunlit rock around it, and a thermal spectrum hotter than the sun itself.

The orphan froze, letting the asteroid draw closer. A plume of incandescent vapour was streaming out of a crater in the hillock; the image was rich with new gestalt tags, all of them incomprehensible, but the infotrope burned a promise into the orphan's mind: *I*

will learn to understand them.

The orphan kept checking the scape addresses of the reference points it had been following, and it found a microscopic change in the asteroid's direction. *The flash of light – and this tiny shift in course – were what everyone had been waiting to see? The fourth citizen had been wrong about what they knew, what they thought, what they wanted... and now they knew that?* The implications rebounded between the symbols, models of minds mirroring models of minds, as the network hunted for sense and stability.

Before the asteroid could coincide with the fourth citizen's icon, the orphan jumped back to its friends.

Inoshiro was furious. "What did you do that for? You ruined everything! You baby!"

Blanca asked gently, "What did you see, Yatima?"

"The rock jumped a little. But I wanted people to think... it wouldn't."

"Idiot! You're always showing off!"

Gabriel said, "Yatima? Why does Inoshiro think you flew with the asteroid?"

The orphan hesitated. "I don't know what Inoshiro thinks."

The symbols for the four citizens shifted into a configuration they'd tried a thousand times before: the fourth citizen, Yatima, set apart from the rest, singled out as unique – this time, as the only one whose thoughts the orphan could know with certainty. And as the symbol network hunted for better ways to express this knowledge, circuitous connections began to tighten, redundant links began to dissolve.

There was no difference between *the model of Yatima's beliefs about the other citizens*, buried inside the symbol for Yatima... and *the models of the other citizens themselves*, inside their respective symbols. The network finally recognized this, and began to discard the unnecessary intermediate stages. The model for Yatima's beliefs became the whole, wider network of the orphan's symbolic knowledge.

And *the model of Yatima's beliefs about Yatima's mind* became *the whole model of Yatima's mind*: not a tiny duplicate, or a crude summary, just a tight bundle of connections looping back out to the thing itself.

The orphan's stream of consciousness surged through the new connections, momentarily unstable with feedback: *I think that Yatima thinks that I think that Yatima thinks...*

Then the symbol network identified the last redundancies, cut a few internal links, and the infinite regress collapsed into a simple, stable resonance:

*I am thinking –*

*I am thinking that I know what I'm thinking.*

Yatima said, "I know what I'm thinking."

Inoshiro replied airily, "What makes you think anyone cares?"

For the five-thousand-and-twenty-third time, the conceptory checked the architecture of the orphan's mind against the polis's definition of self-awareness.

Every criterion was now satisfied.

The conceptory reached into the part of itself which ran the womb, and halted it, halting the orphan. It modified the machinery of the womb slightly, allowing it to run independently, allowing it to be reprogrammed from within. Then it constructed a signature for the

new citizen – two unique megadigit numbers, one private, one public – and embedded them in the orphan's *cypherclerk*, a small structure which had lain dormant, waiting for these keys. It sent a copy of the public signature out into the polis, to be catalogued, to be counted.

Finally, the conceptory passed the virtual machine which had once been the womb into the hands of the polis operating system, surrendering all power over its contents. Cutting it loose, like a cradle set adrift in a stream. It was now the new citizen's *exoself*: its shell, its non-sentient carapace. The citizen was free to reprogramme it at will, but the polis would permit no other software to touch it. The cradle was unsinkable, except from within.

Inoshiro said, "Stop it! Who are you pretending to be now?"

Yatima didn't need to part the navigators; ve knew vis icon hadn't changed appearance, but was now sending out a gestalt tag. It was the kind ve'd noticed the citizens broadcasting the first time ve'd visited the flying-pig scape.

Blanca sent Yatima a different kind of tag; it contained a random number encoded via the public half of Yatima's signature. Before Yatima could even wonder about the meaning of the tag, vis cypherclerk responded to the challenge automatically: decoding Blanca's message, re-encrypting it via Blanca's own public signature, and echoing it back as a third kind of tag. *Claim of identity. Challenge. Response.*

Blanca said, "Welcome to Konishi, Citizen Yatima." Ve turned to Inoshiro, who repeated Blanca's challenge then muttered sullenly, "Welcome, Yatima."

Gabriel said, "And Welcome to the Coalition of Polises."

Yatima gazed at the three of them, bemused – oblivious to the ceremonial words, trying to understand what had changed inside verself. Ve saw vis friends, and the stars, and the crowd, and sensed vis own icon... but even as these ordinary thoughts and perceptions flowed on unimpeded, a new kind of question seemed to spin through the black space behind them all. *Who is thinking this? Who is seeing these stars, and these citizens? Who is wondering about these thoughts, and these sights?*

And the reply came back, not just in words, but in the answering hum of the one symbol among the thousands that reached out to claim all the rest. Not to mirror every thought, but to bind them. To hold them together, like skin.

*Who is thinking this?*

*I am.*

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**Greg Egan** won the John W. Campbell Memorial Award for best sf novel with his *Permutation City* (1994). Born in 1961, he lives in Perth, Australia. The above piece, "Orphanogenesis," is a free-standing extract from his latest novel, *Diaspora* (due out shortly from Orion/Millennium at £16.99).

*The substance of the great life  
completely follows Tao.  
Tao brings about all things  
so chaotically, so darkly.  
Chaotic and dark  
are its images.  
Unfathomable and obscure in it  
is the seed.*

*Tao Te Ching, 21.*

1. I've walked down Jiangsu Road almost every day of my life, ever since I was a little girl. Going to school with my brother Tso, my grandmother would hold our hands and together we'd look in the restaurant windows at the steamed buns and the egg rolls, at the flat stretched chickens which Mr Hsiun told me were wind-dried. I work in that restaurant now, and I know how the food's prepared, but I used to imagine all these poor hens blown about in a roaring gale until all their feathers had gone and they were stiff and thin. It's funny the ideas you get when you're a kid.

Grandma knew everyone then, and they'd come out of the doorways to talk to her. Sometimes we'd go round to see people and I'd sit with a Coke while Grandma fixed something or other: she was always good with machines. Now, no one talks to anyone, and my grandmother stays at home. It seems to me that many things have begun to change, down Jiangsu Road. The sunlight doesn't seem to reach it any more, and last night when I came home from the restaurant, I looked up and saw the stars. I've never noticed them before above the city, because of the lights, but one night at my great aunt's house out in the country Grandma sat on the porch with me and pointed out all the constellations: the shepherd boy, the maiden, all of them. When we went home to Shanghai I got a book and learned them off by heart. But these stars that blaze above me now are different and I don't recognize a single one.

Sometimes the people change, too. I walked down Jiangsu Road yesterday on my way to work, as usual. There wasn't a soul in sight, but just opposite the entrance to the market I turned round and saw that all the doors of the shops were open and everyone was watching me. At first I didn't recognize anyone, but then, to my relief, I realized who they were. They were the dead. I could see old Mr Hsiun, who'd told me about the chickens, and who died about four years ago when we had that cholera outbreak. He was smiling and nodding at me, so I waved. Some of my relatives were there, too: I saw my great uncle Leo. I went over to have a word.

"So you're still living here?" I said.

"Yes, yes, we're still here; we haven't moved," Leo said. "We heard your prayers. Thanks." He smiled at me, but there was nothing behind his eyes. He looked as two-dimensional as a paper doll, and then the wind shredded him into tatters, so I walked away.

The restaurant was still in its usual place, but the

# A Child of the Dead

*Liz Williams*

chickens that were hung up in the windows had gone and in their place were things that looked like ribcages; human ones, I suppose, but I'm not really sure. Anyway, after that it all melted away and I was back in the normal world and late for work. I'm trying to ignore these odd episodes; there are too many other things to worry about at the moment. I'm working double shifts at the restaurant now, because we spoke to the doctors yesterday and they said that we're behind with the payments for Tso's treatment. We can't very well abandon the treatment halfway through, so it's a question of either taking out a loan, which I don't want to do, or trying to catch up. I suppose we'll just have to manage. At least if one of us can get proper treatment, it makes things seem a little better, and it has to be Tso, because he's a boy.

**2.** My grandmother, as she sits in front of the flat eye of the old computer screen, tells me that I should put my faith in machines rather than the chancy flesh. Perhaps she's right; I don't know any more. I'm just going from day to day at the moment: working at the restaurant, cleaning the flat, taking Tso to the hospital once a week. I took him up there this morning. They had him in the viral unit for almost two hours, while I waited outside. I tried to get tea out of the machine with a plastic chip they give you at the takeaway, but it broke off and stuck in the slot so I had to sit there, guilty and thirsty, while everyone gave me dirty looks. Then when Tso came out we had to spend ten dollars on a taxi because he was still a bit groggy.

After that I went to the restaurant and started my waitressing shift, but I was late again and they docked my wages. It's not been a very good day, today.

**3.** When I got back last night, Grandma was still up; sitting with her ear to the lifeless terminal.

"You know what?" she said. "Sometimes, if I listen hard enough, I think I can still hear them."

"Who?" I asked.

"All those voices. In the old days, you could log on, you could talk to people. Thousands of voices... out there, everywhere." She gave the terminal a shake, as if it needed only a little encouragement to get it going again.

"Yeah, you said." Grandma used to tell me stories about the e-net, but it didn't sound much to me. All you could hear was a lot of people and static on the other end of the line, crackling and bounced off a strand satellite. She never had a very good machine: only the little home-made portable. Well, those days were long gone and there was the future to think about now. I drew a deep breath.

"Grandma? Listen, a couple of days ago I stopped off at the market and spoke to Tony Tang. I don't know how you're going to feel about this, but he thinks he might be able to get me a cheap deal." I muttered the words, but I got her full attention. She gave me a beady look.

"What sort of cheap deal?"

"Well, you know... He thinks he could get me some equipment. Just some basic stuff..."

"And how do you propose to pay for it?" I wished I'd never started the conversation. I should have just got on with it and said nothing, but I couldn't tell her now that I'd already done a deal with Tony. A *fait accompli*, I think they call it.

Reluctantly, I said: "The thing is, I'm 13 now. So I don't really want to wait much longer, because, I guess, it won't be long before I'm too old. To learn how to use the new technology. You know?"

She was quiet for a while, and then she said: "Li Hua... we were talking about the old days just now. I can't help feeling that things were better then. Maybe I just don't understand this new technology of yours. I trained with machines, you see? Chips and neural nets and A-life, but things moved on so quickly. Two years after I graduated, Genreng Pharmaceuticals started to develop neuroviral interfacing – the bioweb, the Hsing-tao, whatever they call it these days – and I found out I was obsolete. I was too old to be put through the new programme. Past it, you see. I was 19. And in the old days, at least you had the hope of another job when your technician career was over. I don't like this modern technology, Li Hua. I don't trust it, and I don't want you hanging round Tony Tang and his cut price under-the-counter deals."

I said: "Okay. Look, I'm going to bed. I'll see you in the morning," and I left her staring at the blankness of the screen. I hate arguing with Grandma. It always makes me feel guilty, because I know she paid a lot of money for Tso and me. She wanted a child so badly, but she couldn't even have that. There was something wrong with her ova, some genetic thing, and they had to terminate her pregnancy. But fortunately, when they checked the foetus, they found its ova were fine, so they just fertilized two of them and transplanted them into a breeder and Grandma got Tso and me. That's all my poor mother was, a scrap of meat in a jar, and my father maybe less than that. I sometimes wonder if that's why I seem to be seeing ghosts all the time, being a child of the dead; but I know that isn't the real reason.

**4.** I went to see Tang again this afternoon in his shop at the back of the herbalist's. He was bent over the desk, doing something with a culture dish. He had one of those dried snakes that they make pills out of sitting on the desk and when he saw me he rattled it at me, hissing.

"Cute," I said. I pulled up a stool and watched him as he worked. I drew a finger down the snake's skeletal spine: it felt as light and dry as air.

"So, did you speak to your grandma?" Tony asked.

"Yeah. Well, I tried. She wasn't very keen, to be honest. She's old-fashioned, Tony, you know?"

"Sure. She's an old lady. When she was your age, they just didn't do this kind of thing. Times change. Your grandma knows that." He paused, concentrating on the contents of the dish beneath the microscope.

"Do you still want to go ahead with our deal?" he asked.

I said: "If I decided to back out now, could I? I mean, is it too late?"

"No. No, it's not too late." He looked up, and his round face was earnest. "And you should know something, Li

Hua, I wouldn't charge you for the equipment you've already used. I mean, I wouldn't do that."

"I know," I said. "It's okay; don't be silly. I want to carry on with it. Can I have a look at this?" I squinted down the scope while he held the microdermic. I could see the little blob, and the tip of the dermic penetrating it.

"That's all it is," Tony said.

"So how long will it take?"

"Ten minutes."

"Oh, okay, not so long, then. So I could go in on my way to work?"

"Whenever I've made an appointment for you at the doctor's in Xiang Road. She's a woman; I thought you might prefer that." That's one of the things I like about Tony Tang; he's thoughtful.

"Thanks," I said. "What about tomorrow?"

"If you like. Stop in here on your way back, let me know how it went. You'll need more of the equipment then, anyway."

"Okay, see you then," I said, picking up my bag. I didn't want to tell him about the hallucinations; I was scared that he might think it was a bad omen and get cold feet. I left without saying anything.

"Keep the snake," he said, on my way out the door.

**5.** The session at the doctor's wasn't as bad as I'd thought. The doctor was really nice, and afterwards she gave me a can of paracola, which she needn't have done.

"Do I have to do anything else?" I asked her.

"No, that's it. You shouldn't have any complications, but if you do, you come right back and let me know. You said your periods haven't started yet?"

"No, that's right," I said.

"Okay. It might have a slight effect, but there shouldn't be any problems." She helped me down from the couch. "There you are. You're all done."

**6.** I guess Tony might have felt a little sorry for me, because as well as the equipment he gave me 20 dollars. Then at the weekend, it was New Year's and I made nearly 300 in tips. It was more money than I'd ever seen before. Grandma and I counted it up today, before we stashed it under the bed, and Tso watched us from the bunk bed, smiling. I'm so relieved. Now we can pay off the hospital fees and in a month or so Tso can start work. I suppose I'm sorry, in a way, because we won't see much of him once he's got a job. Tso's doctor has been helpful; he says that he might be able to get Tso a place at an institute in Harbin. It's a long way away, but it's worth it.

I took my grandmother out this evening. Mrs Eng came in to look after Tso, and Grandma and I went out to dinner. I told her to order anything she liked, no matter how much it cost.

"You're a good girl, Li Hua," she said.

"Isn't it great? Tso's treatment, I mean." I couldn't stop talking about it.

"Yes," she said, but she still looked sad. I reached across the table and squeezed her hand.

"Don't worry," I told her.

"Oh, I suppose I'm pleased for Tso, if that's what he wants, but it just seems – I'm sorry, Li. I know I'm old-fashioned, but things were just different in the past, you see." Suddenly, I could see, she was angry. I knew that she wasn't mad at me, but I kept quiet, anyway. It was as though she was talking to herself. "All those machines, Li Hua, all those wonderful machines. Then Genreng invent the bioweb, and computers aren't any use any more. Machine obsolescence. Suddenly there's the bioweb, and how do you access it? You've got to be part of it, your whole body, through a neuroviral interface. And you can't do that unless you get dosed up with one of their synthetic viruses, and you've got to be young." She snorted. "You can't tell me that there's nothing wrong with that: making yourself ill so that you can be part of the global communications network."

She fell silent and I stared at the table. I couldn't quite see what the problem was. I thought of Tso, in a month's time; lying in a cot in Harbin, sailing the viral pathways, able to reach out to everyone else who was infected. A disease is a system, I understood, and I thought it was a great mark of progress: that we no longer needed to invent machines, computers, for the resources had been with us all along. Tso would be another link in the great chain of the neuroviral web, and it in turn would convey all the information he needed: the world as one great mind, unified.

"And then what happens?" my grandmother murmured. "He'll work for a few years, and then what? How do we know he's even got a future after that?"

"It's not like that, Grandma! The doctors told me. They just give you a cure, it's all perfectly straightforward."

"Maybe." She did not sound very sure. She reached out and patted my hand. "At least you'll still be here, Li Hua."

I didn't want to tell her, then, that she was wrong. Even with the low-grade viral equipment that Tang's given me in exchange for the ova, I should be able to get a job in some webshop somewhere, and then I'll be able to reach out across the thousand miles to Harbin, and beyond, and my brother will be there. Grandma doesn't understand, you see, that you have to accommodate yourself to life, to Tao. It's like water, you have to go wherever it takes you, and you can't stop it for long. She always wanted to leave the body behind, soar out into the electronic sunlight, but you can't do that. You have to go the other way, into darkness, into the body itself. But I didn't want to argue with her, and this was something we could talk about later.

I reached out and poured more tea into her cup. I smiled at my grandmother and I could tell from the side-effects that Tang's virus was working, for outside the window the faces of the dead clustered in the shadows, beneath the unknown stars.

**Liz Williams** is 32, lives in Brighton, and has a PhD in philosophy from Cambridge University. "A Child of the Dead" (which will also appear in Gwyneth Jones's electronic online magazine *The Star*, from September 1997) is her first story to see print, although she has had a couple of others accepted recently by small magazines.

I suppose it was only a matter of time before comic movies caught on to how the genre really works. Crucial to the paradoxical fascination of the comic medium is that it's the mass-produced drivel, rather than the trace-level scattering of honest quality, that's best equipped to strip the soft tissue from narrative to expose the stark sinews of our infantile dreams. Most comic fans would agree that there's a kind of dreadful sublimity about really low-grade, inspirationless superhero plotting, resulting from the unique combination of a relentless narrative production line, scripted at high speed to frantic serial deadlines, with a complete absence of all real-world restraints on cause and effect. The world of bad superhero plotting is the one substantial narrative production of the western world in which all deaths are reversible, all reality is negotiable, and there are no constraints whatever on the scale or content of action beyond those imposed by the market and the Comics Code. Any time you feel that storylines have been getting a bit stale since the last time you killed off Professor X, or that the current story arc is going nowhere and would be best written off as a dream/hoax/parallel universe, or that readers would spend more time in their bathrooms if Psychotic Leather Girl were to be brought back from the dead and undergo a Xena-like Damascene conversion to the forces of light, you can just go *right ahead*. And to cap it all, this raw power of fantasy without frontiers is unleashed in a genre already customized to give visual and narrative shape to seething adolescent fantasies about body, differentness, and desire.

Understanding little of these mysteries, an unkind world has been

swift in judgment of *Batman & Robin*, seeing in it nothing more than a cold mechanical artefact of the Hollywood packaging system at its most cynical. Well, duh, chaps: this is how *all* summer blockbusters are made, and if *Batman & Robin* shows the traces more obviously than most it's simply one more mark of how superhero serials lay bare, then write large, the uneasy architecture of our dreams. Obviously it goes without saying that in conventional terms *Batman & Robin* is grim, soulless entertainment, a dreadful travesty of everything that was extraordinary about the original Burton-Waters-Keaton films, and peppered with the kind of dialogue usually reserved for Hong Kong subtitles ("I hate to disappoint you, but rubber lips are immune to your charms"). But it's an immeasurably more complex and interesting movie than its immediate forerunner, the quite shocking (and yet tolerantly-received) *Batman Forever* – which reset expectations to zero or below, while drastically redefining the future of the franchise in ways guaranteed to offend the irritating minority who thought the Burton posse had not only got it more-or-less right but made something irreducibly fine and strange in the process.

To appreciate the genuine virtuosity of the Schumacher *Batmen*, you need to purge your head of outmoded petit-bourgeois notions of cinema aesthetics and retune your sensibilities to the poetics of packaging. From the start, the Batman movies have been the most tailor-made in history for the kind of radical top-downsmanship that Hollywood likes to do best – where you start with a title, then recruit a cast, and only afterwards start to worry about the film's actual

content. Not only is the central character by now as arbitrarily-recastable as the script and direction, using actors whose resemblance to their predecessors and to earlier interpretations of the hero are both optional to the point of dispensability; but from its inception the series has been set up to be friendlier to its celebrity guests than to its mainstays, with the principal villains regularly commanding higher salaries and billing than the lead, in 2-for-1 roles personally-tailored to magnify star quality beyond the range available in dreary single-identified naturalism. *B&R*'s descent to frankly C-list batnemeses does seem to mark a new openness about the way our heroes' adventures are controlled by the stars, but one can see that the supply of famous mugsters willing to drop their trousers for this stuff is drying up fast.

So it's not really the director's fault that he's been landed with such a dispiriting selection, or that the outcome is such an effective indictment of the process of casting by banker's draft. It's admittedly sad to see Schwarzenegger having to don a cartoon suit these days just to deliver, badly and with extra bass, the kind of heavily-accented one-liners that used to be so much (indeed, all) of his charm. But one has to admire the desperate ingenuity of attempts to accommodate the topliner's yen for depth and complexity in the role of one of the silliest of costume villains. You see, Mr Freeze is no ordinary diamond thief; no indeed. He has complex motivation: he's stealing diamonds (i) to build a freezing engine (ii) to hold Gotham City to ransom (iii) to secure funding (iv) to continue his research (v) to save his popsicle wife from the ravages of an incurable disease – so he's not really evil, just

having trouble balancing the greater good of a loving relationship in a future free from sickness against the immediate cost of ten million citizens iced to oblivion. And that's probably just because he fell into a vat of something – surely excusable in a town where people are always falling into vats of stuff, and invariably emerging with novelty metabolisms and psychotic inspirations about destroying Batman and holding the city to ransom.

The rest of the package can plead equally mitigating circumstances. True, Uma Thurman was a regrettable mistake, because she really isn't very sexy and has never really been able to act for caramel apples. But there's a desperate shortage of even-hypeably erotic females in the star atlas epoch 2000, and you can understand why some cv-browsing suit with no notion of how film chemistry works might have thought for one fatal moment she was what this movie wanted. And it's certainly nobody's fault, and if anything an unplanned entertainment bonus, that Alicia Silverstone was impulsively signed up for Batgirl before all that unfortunateness blew up over her partiality for the fruits of success. (One can't help noticing that the lingering bum shots promised by the trailer – a body double? – are conspicuously few and fleeting on the actual screen; and when the virtual Alfred informs his niece "I took the liberty to create something in your size," a gentleman instantly understands the discreetly-unspoken "Of course, now it'll need taking out a bit.")

And what, as we near the bottom of the salarysheet, of this year's Batman? To say that George Clooney is staggeringly miscast would be to fall victim to just the kind of primitive thought-patterns *Batman & Robin* is designed to scramble. The single most important thing for the current Batman is that he should be chat-show-savvy and PR-friendly in the ways that his predecessors so conspicuously weren't. If that means someone who comes over about as dark and troubled as an Irn-Bru spritzer, so much the better, because that just underlines the way all that therapy he did when he was Val Kilmer, poor man, has left Bruce Wayne a healed, socialized, post-Burtonian kind of guy, able to relate in a normal Hollywood way to family, colleagues, and the non-rich.

And this is where *Batman & Robin* has a genuinely extraordinary vision of the world, as compelling in its way as Tim Burton's, and the more so for the complete absence of any ironizing or distance. For anyone who hasn't fallen into the Hollywood vat and had their veins flushed out with candyfloss, *Batman & Robin* is a mesmerizing crash course in what it does

to your head. Every relationship in this film is conceived in a way that only movie people could conceive them; with the dysfunctionality of the *Batman* franchise itself as the principal exhibit. The vividly-incoherent main theme, the relationship between "partners" and "family," reflects quite openly on what happens to a team effort when the junior partner seeks a bigger contractual slice ("I'm tired of living in your shadow! I want a Robin signal in the sky!"), and walks out on future adventures when his terms aren't met ("I don't need your help – I'm going solo"). It's left to the frailly patriarchal Michael Gough, in his dual capacity as wizened, demigodic Bob Kane figure and as last surviving member of the original cast, to plead the case for the Bat-team as no mere contractual partnership but a sacred familial bond. "When one becomes ancient," says Alfred before invoking the clause that permits him to spend the remainder of the film acting the Bat-socks off the rest of the cast while literally lying down, "one yearns for family." And in the end, he has his reward, as the partnership is reconstituted on a broader, dynastic footing, promising what ooden-day comics used to blazon as *Thrilling Adventures of the Whole Bat-Family!* "We're going to need a bigger cave," says the



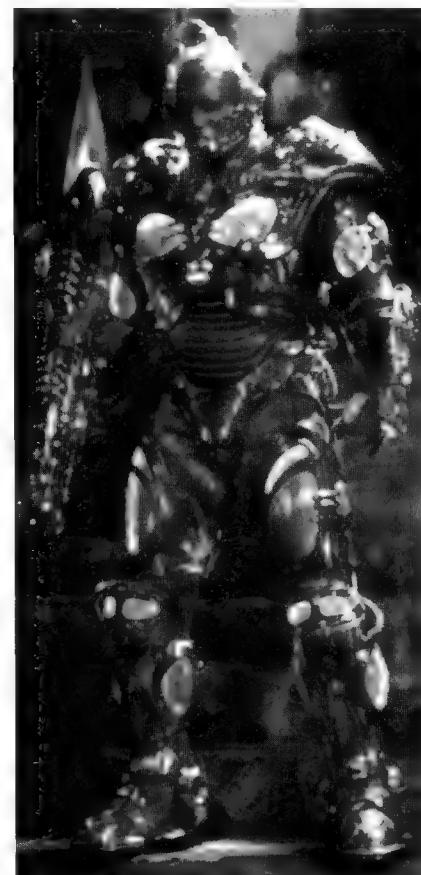
main man, more wrily prophetic than even he knows.

As so often, but rarely so nakedly, all this soggy affirmation of family, with its heart-warping moviespeak exchanges of "I love you, old man" / "And I love you too," is really about blocking out responsibility to any wider world. There's a telling moment when eco-warrior Ivy confronts Bruce Wayne on the dayjob in her own mufti identity as a kind of lab-coated Robin Cook, and delivers a stirring denunciation of Batman and Robin as "militant protectors of the status quo," backed up with a detailed written proposal of how Wayne Enterprises can clean up its whole ecological act. Bruce flips through incredulously: "No diesel fuel for heat? Millions of people would die of cold!" Despite the glaring reality that all the diesel burned in the film is actually used for vehicle chases, this is enough to see Dr Isley laughed off the set, and our hero is left to go ahead with helping Gaia the Bruce Wayne way (host a gala Save the Rainforest costume ball where unlovable people with dodgy money can bid for the heroine's sexual favours à la Brigitte Nielsen. It's for charity!). That the film's one genuine idealist and dissident comes back with a bullet as a flagrant and tasteless personification of HIV, terminally infecting all who kiss her without ensafement (only young Robin is sensible enough to use rubber protection, q.v. supra), just shows that those bleeding-heart tree-huggers are really toxic vermin who need to be exterminated before they infect us all. Hollywood isn't often this undisguised in its heroizing of the rich, the corporate, and the reality-detached against vigilante gadflies with dissident visions of their own. But then it's not often that a serial movie franchise has managed to prise itself free from so many dangerously-talented people; and in a family business like this, woe betide anyone caught failing to join in the hug.

Nick Lowe

#### Batman and Robin:

Opposite: Alicia Silverstone as Batgirl, Chris O'Donnell as Robin, and George Clooney as Batman; above: Uma Thurman as Poison Ivy, and below: Arnold Schwarzenegger as Mr. Freeze



# TUBE CORN

*Wendy Bradley*

**P**oltergeist: *The Legacy* (Channel 5) really isn't helped by being shown two episodes at a time, back to back, on a dull Tuesday evening. It's one of those cheap imports that looks like a cheap import and, in bulk, like a *really* cheap import. Something like *NYPD Blue* can stand an off-season repeat where it is lumped into the schedule two episodes at a time back to back because each episode is a meaty plot-stuffed confection which shows some character development as well as some internal consistency and continuity. *Poltergeist: The Legacy* can't, because doubling the quantity simply doubles our opportunities to notice that it seems to have been put together on the "chuck in any old crap, they won't care" method.

The basic premise is that there is one of those mysteriously wealthy and benevolent Foundations running a medieval-style manor house full of hi-tech equipment. It's the kind of Foundation that, if you believe their telly, the States is crammed with – remember the Foundation for, what, Law and Government? in *Knight Rider* and the guys that kept sending MacGyver off to save the world with sticky-backed plastic – only the *Legacy* manor house has actual stained-glass windows so you can tell how altogether ooky this particular bunch is going to be. And *The Legacy* aren't just an undemocratically constituted quango with more money than sense but are in fact an ancient organization going back to the dawn of time da de da de da... *The Legacy* is staffed by ze patriarch wiz ze amuzing (I think we're supposed to find it sexy) accent, a chewy navy seal, the groovy guy from those gay-subtext Guinness adverts, an hysterical mommy with a sickeningly psychic girly, and the black woman not appearing in this episode. And in each episode something weird and wonderful happens and they wander off to save the world from it, perhaps along the way helping someone's restless spirit to ascend to heaven in a twinkle of beam-me-up-Scotty lights.

Actually, reading back the last paragraph, I seem to be doing the

thing Barry Norman does when he tells you a film is awful and you come away thinking, yes, but I really must see it. The reason my mind was wandering onto, say, "where have I seen that guy before, oh I know, he's the one from the Guinness advert," is because it was either that or fall asleep. The overall pace of the programmes is slow, slow, slow slow slow; but although we'd have the time to work out what was going to happen a hundred times over nevertheless, bizarrely, because there is very little in the way of plot construction or internal consistency to trouble ourselves with, it's not in fact possible to work out what's going to happen next. Largely this is because what happens seems to depend on who's available to film the final scene and what they can be bothered to learn by way of explanatory dialogue. If all else fails, get the Guinness guy to tog up in a dog collar and exorcise something. Don't bother to watch; or if you feel you have to, at least spare yourself the extra 45 minutes by only watching one. Yes, they're *all* that boring. But, as Ford Prefect might say, fairly harmless.

**S**o what is it with pacing on sf shows? Are we supposed to be so weighted down by our anoraks and Spock ears that we can't possibly keep two coherent thoughts in our pretty little heads at once? I can think of no other explanation for the incredible tedium which is *The Outer Limits* (BBC 2, Sunday nights). Now this series of self-contained playlets, the TV equivalent of a book of themed short stories, perfectly reeks of quality: it has serious guest stars, some of whom can even act. It has movie-quality film stock and production values and comes with "serious money" written all the way through it like Brighton rock. But to watch it is to enter an alternate reality where time has been slowed down and ... everything ... passes ... by ... more ... and ... more ... slowly ... until ... finally ... you ... creak ... to ... the ... ultimate ... revelation ... which ... you'd ...

guessed ..... hours ..... ago.

Mark Hamill, for example, turned up in his cultural-icon/guest-with-gravitas mode in the one where he was a shy scientist with a crush on a colleague and, handily, a machine for linking their consciousnesses together when she went into a coma. So she was wandering around in this shared subconscious space discovering his secret and occasionally being attacked by another, mud-covered, version of herself, while in real life the ultra-smart, female-voiced, learning-at-an-exponential-rate computer kept asking to be fed with data about lurve. Now, honestly, which of you who saw this wasn't yelling "reach out with your feelings!" at Hamill's character, hmm? And those of you who missed it, tell me what happened, right now, from my synopsis. Yes, not difficult, is it? Hands up anyone who didn't put "the woman Hamill kept meeting in shared space was the computer which had developed a crush on him, and the figure that kept trying to break through and attack her was, of course, the actual consciousness of the comatose heroine." But we knew that after 15 minutes and the exposition was so so sloooooooooow that you had to keep watching to the end for fear they *couldn't* be going to leave it at that, that there *must* be a twist or two yet to come, a bit of cleverness in store.

There wasn't. That was it. Oh puh-leez! How come sf is a literature of ideas, but a medium of stupidity? Or to put it another way, if we're all so smart then why is our television so dumb? I think I need to think about that one.

**F**inally, *Millennium* (ITV, Sunday nights). Perhaps it will improve and you will all sit and scratch your heads while reading this in six weeks' time, saying "what is the woman going on about?"

*Millennium*'s claim to genre inclusion is, I suppose, mainly because of the central premise, the ability Frank Black the hero has to "get inside the mind" of serial killers. He can protest all he likes that it isn't a psychic talent, but from the evidence

so far there's no way his "ability" is anything natural, unless it's a natural ability to read to the end of the script. On being taken to see the first corpse he demurred at the offer of an unzipping of the body bag and, from pure proximity, had a technicolor flashback of her grisly demise. I have to tell you this is *not* normal investigative technique. So, all right, let's accept the series into our genre. It is, after all, created by Chris Carter, the creator of *The X-Files*: we all knew that already. But what do we watch *The X-Files* for? For the bodies, the horror, the grue? Gentle reader, I

think not (and, if you remember, I said as much in March).

In *Millennium* that – bodies, horror, grue – seems to be all that there is. I loathed it from the moment it began, with the killer arriving at the peepshow so that we could linger over the strippers' unfeasibly perfect flesh as they undulated for an unnecessarily extended time. The gender role-play in this episode was beyond offensive, into pornographic. Every woman was nothing more than bimbo victim: including the hero's wife and daughter who might as well have written "kill me now" across their

foreheads and been done with it.

If the defining image of *The X-Files* is the beams of torchlight in the darkness that stand for the search for truth, the defining image of the first episode of *Millennium* was the interview with the witness where the clothed, sombre hero stood one side of the glass in shadow and the brightly lit, barely clad woman stood on the other: objectified, framed in the peepshow, making a frame of our TV sets, making voyeurs of us all.

What was Chris Carter thinking of?  
Wendy Bradley

# Soul Music

Irene Shettle

OK, I'll own up. I was the one who told Wendy Bradley ("Tube Corn," *Interzone* 122) that the saintly June Whitfield had sung the *real* B..... word in the famous Hedgehog song – but apparently she hadn't. Having read most of Terry Pratchett's Discworld books and enjoyed them to varying degrees, I'd made the slip of hearing what I was expecting rather than what was actually there. This demonstrates two points – how skilfully it was done, and the fact that every reader of a book coming to its TV version will have their own images and knowledge of the characters and the world that they inhabit. Inevitably, vast areas of potential disappointment, frustration, glee or surprise are available for exploration by anyone who has already invented their own mini-universe, depending on the closeness to or diversion from their personal mental construct. I have not yet forgotten my own unease at Ralph Bakshi's *Lord of the Rings* – Gollum satisfied whereas the Hobbits were laughably unlike anything I would have wanted to imagine.

So, bearing this in mind, how did I react to the Cosgrove Hall animated version of the Discworld? To be honest, my immediate response after the first episode of *Wyrd Sisters* was: "Is that it?" On reflection this was probably due to my over-familiarity with the story and the big jokes in this particular book, and also because I found the episodes slightly too short at 30 minutes – just as you were getting into the swing of things you were jettisoned without due warning. (Maybe this was

supposed to be the "leave them wanting more" factor, but it left me feeling slightly cheated).

Eventually I adjusted to this particular Discworld and its denizens, and was won over. Some of the characters, such as the witches, were spot on. I was particularly taken by Granny Weatherwax's boots, which were unaccountably missing from my own Discworld but have now cunningly infiltrated their way in. Death, however, seemed to be lacking in something which I couldn't quite define: wonderfully sepulchral as Christopher Lee's vocal presentation was, he just didn't seem to be speaking in LARGE ENOUGH CAPITAL LETTERS. (Maybe I need to invest in proper Surround Sound?) A big hooray though for the wonderful "Peter Sellers-doing-Olivier-doing-Richard III" version of the villainous Felmet and his consort, looking for all the world like an overweight red-haired Princess Leia (it must be the Danish pastry earmuffs that made me say that!). By the end of the last episode I was genuinely disappointed that there was no more to come, and was looking forward to seeing *Soul Music*.

As with the previous series there were several satisfying small, unobtrusive and inventive features that either pleased or amused, some of which I only noticed on the second viewing: in *Wyrd Sisters* the currant-bun bat's eyes cleverly dissolved into the eyes of King Verence and led to a seamless scene change; in *Soul Music* the Assassins appeared to have escaped from *The Three Musketeers*, and Glod the dwarf had acquired a Liverpudlian accent

which seemed so right. Where the first series had run through variations on every aspect of Shakespeare and strolling players, the second presented a glorious commentary on the music scene, and the apparently mistaken concept that Rock and Roll can never die, disproved here by Death. The actual musical numbers were brilliant pastiches of Hendrix, Elvis, the Blues Brothers and the Beatles, to name a few, while the humour varied from the corny (it's my patty, and I'll fry if I want to) to the even cornier (Death being named Beau Nidle, when joining the Klatchian Foreign Legion, for instance – geddit?). There are plenty of in-jokes for the cognoscenti and it is difficult to tell where Pratchett ends and the scriptwriters' insertions begin. Did he really invent a pub called the Slaughtered Cabbage in Scrote, or was that their inspired addition? Some of the humour from the page was obviously always going to be difficult to transfer to the screen – unless you are a Welsh speaker you are unlikely to be aware of the Dylan Thomas connotations of the name of Buddy's home town (Llamedos) since it never appears in printed form on the screen – but the cartoon has enough going for it without that. New readers have that pleasure, and the glories of Pratchett's footnotes, to come.

My overall verdict on the two series? If an impulse to rush off and re-read the book is a measure of the success of a serialization then both had what it takes. And the cartoon version of the Death of Rats (a.k.a. the Grim Squeaker) has provided me with a new favourite character. More please!

Irene Shettle

I know I'm still lying here in the regolith, on this dumb little misshapen asteroid, inside my fubar suit. I know nobody's come to save me. Because I'm still here, right? But I can't see, hear, feel a damn thing.

Although I sometimes think I can.

I'm going stir-crazy, inside my own head.

I know they're coming to kill me, though. *The little guys.* The nems told me that much.

So I have a decision to make.

Them or me.

She drifted in blue warmth, her thoughts dissolving.

... Consciousness burst in on her, dark and dry, dispelling the fug of her prenatal dream. She gasped and coughed, expelling fluid from her lungs.

She was turned around, by huge, confident hands. She was held before a looming face, smiling, wet. Her mother.

There were people all around, naked, thin, anxious. Even so, they smiled at this new birth.

Her eyes were clearing quickly. She – they – were in some kind of huge hall, a vast cylindrical space. The roof, far above, was clear, and some kind of light moved beyond it. There was water in the base of the hall, a great trapped river of it, dense with green. The people were clustered at the edge of the water, on a smooth, sloping beach. Children were playing in the water, which lapped gently against the walls.

Adults clustered around, plucking at her fingers and toes, which grew with a creaking of soft, stretching skin. The growth hurt, and she cried. She squirmed against her mother, seeking an escape from this dismal cold.

Her mother put her down, on the sloping wall.

Still moist from birth, she crawled away, towards the water.

One of the children came stalking out of the murky water on skinny legs. It was a boy. He spoke to her, pointing and smiling. At first the words made no sense, but they soon seemed to catch. *Brother. Sister. Mother. River.*

She tried to speak back, but her mouth was soft and sticky.

The boy – her brother – ran back to the water. She followed, crawling, already impatient, already trying to stand upright.

The water was warm and welcoming, and full of sticky green stuff. She splashed out until her head was covered.

Swimming was easier than crawling, or walking.

Her brother showed her how to use her fingers to filter out the green stuff. *Algae*, he said. She could see little knots and spirals in the green mats.

She crammed the green stuff into her mouth, gnawing at it with her gums, with her growing buds of teeth, sucking it into her stomach. She was very, very hungry.

Her name, they said, was Green Wave.

I was born at the wrong time, in the wrong place.

In the year 2050, when I was 18 years old, no American was flying into space. We'd ceded the high frontier: the Moon to the Japanese, Mars to the Russians, the asteroid belt to the Chinese. America, without space resources, got steadily poorer, not to mention more decadent. A hell of a time to grow up.

I come from enterprising stock. One of my ancestors made a fortune hauling bauxite on 20-mule trains out

of Death Valley. He also got himself killed, however. Another ancestor was one of the first in the Texas oil fields. And so on.

We lost all the money, of course, long before I was born. But we're a family with one hell of a tradition.

But when I grew up we were rattling around in a box, with no place to go.

I served in the Army. I studied astronomy. I tried to figure an angle: some place out there the Russians and Chinese hadn't got locked up yet.

Finally I settled on the Trojans: little bunches of asteroids outside the main belt, 60 degrees ahead of and behind Jupiter, shepherded by gravity effects. The density of the rocks there is actually greater than in the main belt.

Not only that, the asteroids out there are different from the ones in the belt, which are lumps of basalt and metal. The Trojans are carbonaceous: that is, coated in carbon compounds. And they have water.

And nobody had been out there, ever.

I started to raise money.

My ship, when assembled, was a stack of boxes 50 metres long. At its base was a big pusher plate, mounted on shock absorbers. Around that there were fuel magazines and superconducting hoops. There were big solar-cell wings stuck on the sides.

The drive was a fusion-pulse pusher. It worked by shooting pellets of helium-3 and deuterium out the back of the craft, behind the pusher plate, and firing carbon dioxide lasers at them. Each fusion pulse lasts 250 nanoseconds. And then another, and another: 300 microexplosions each second. My acceleration was three per cent of G.

My hab module was just a box, with a reconditioned Russian-design closed-loop life support, and an exercise bicycle.

It was a leaky piece of shit. For instance I watched the engineers fix up a ding in a reaction control thruster fuel line with Kevlar and epoxy, the way you'd repair your refrigerator. I spent as little as I could on my ship, and a lot on my suit, which is a Japanese design. I called it my fubar suit, my safety option of last resort.

In the event, I was glad to have it.

I was looking at an 18-day trip to the Trojans.

I said goodbye to the investors, all of whom had bought a piece of my ass at no risk to themselves. I said goodbye to my daughter. That was hard. I'd said goodbye to her father long before.

I called my ship the *Malenfant*, after that great explorer. I wasn't exploring, of course, but I always had a little romance in my soul, I think.

When I left Earth orbit, the glow of my drive turned Pacific night into day.

On her second day, she woke up a spindly-legged girl almost as tall, already, as her mother. She spent as long as she could in the water, dragging at the algae. They all did, most of the time.

There was never enough to eat. Sometimes the algae was so thin she could barely taste it sticking to her fingers. She was hungry, the whole time, and she kept on growing.

Her brother touched her shoulder. "Get out," he said. His name was Sun Eyes.

"What?"

He took her hand and pulled her from the river. Everybody else was clambering up the curving bank too.

Something was approaching, under the surface of the water, from the darkness at the end of the hall. Something big and sleek and powerful, that churned the water.

Green Wave was one of a row of skinny naked people, waiting by the edge of the water. "What is it?"

Sun Eyes shrugged. "It's a Worker."

"What's a Worker?"

"One of those."

A lot of her questions were answered like that.

The river wasn't really a river, more a long, stagnant pond. The Workers, coming by once or twice a day, stirred up the liquid. Maybe it was good for the algae, Green Wave speculated.

Anyhow, when a Worker came along, the people had to get out of the way.

As soon as it had gone, she joined the rush to splash back into the water. But the algae was thinner than before.

"The Workers take away the algae," said Sun Eyes.

"Why? Can't they see we're hungry?"

Sun Eyes shrugged.

"I don't like the Workers," said Green Wave.

Sun Eyes laughed at her.

The facts of her life were these:

This place was called Finger Hall. It was a cylinder, roofed over by some material that allowed in a dim, murky light during the short day. The river ran down its length. The Hall was maybe ten times as tall as an adult human.

The Hall, it was said, was one of five – five Fingers, in fact, lying parallel. The Halls were joined at one end by a big cavern, as her own fingers were joined at her hand. Her mother said she saw this Palm Cavern once, early in her life, three or four days ago. Her brother had never left Finger Hall.

The only drink was river water. The only food was river algae.

That day, her brother spent a lot of time with a girl. And there was a boy, Churning Wake, who started paying attention to Green Wave. He even brought her handfuls of algae, the only gift he had.

This was her second day. On the third, she came to understand, she would be expected to pair with somebody. Maybe this kid Churning Wake. She would have a baby of her own on the third or fourth day, maybe another.

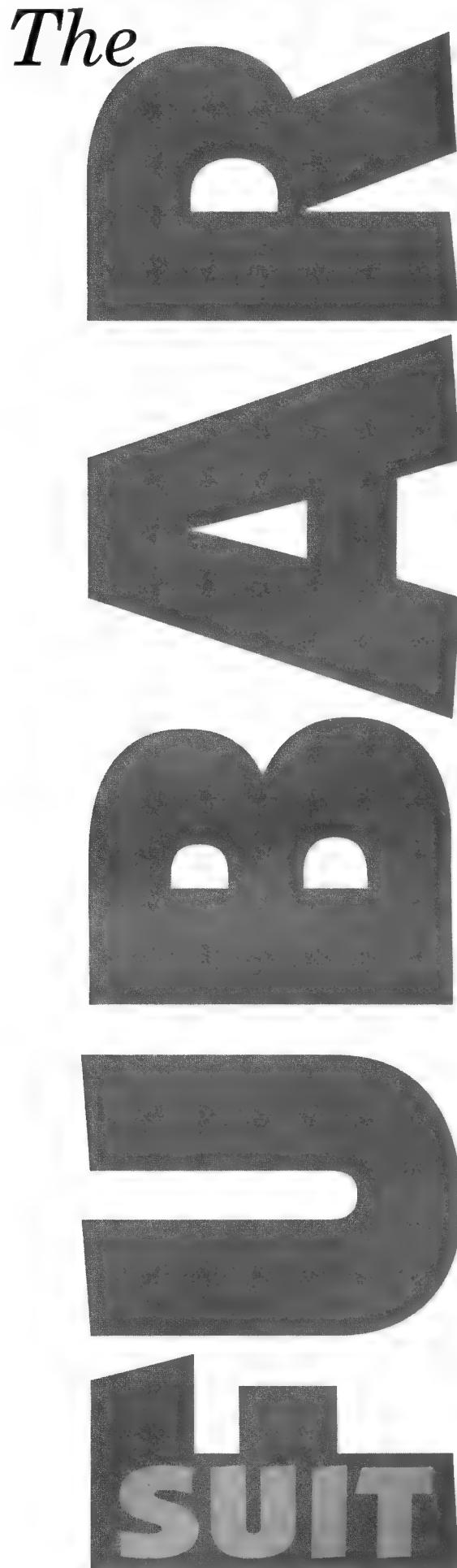
And on the fifth day –

Her mother was five days old. She was thin, bent, her breasts empty sacks of flesh. Green Wave brought her algae handfuls.

An old man died. His children grieved, then carried his body to the edge of the water. He had been seven days old.

Soon a Worker clambered out of the water. It was a wide, fat disc, half the height of an adult, and its rim was studded with jointed limbs.

The Worker cut up the body of the old man, snip snip, into bloodless pieces. It loaded the chunks of corpse into a hatch on its back, and then closed itself up and slid smoothly back into the water.



*Stephen Baxter*

"Why did it do that?" Green Wave asked.  
"I don't know," her mother said. She was wheezing.  
"You have a lot of questions, Green Wave. His name was Purple Glow, because on the day he was born —"

"Is that it? We're born, we eat algae, we die? Is that all there is?"

"We care for each other. We tell the children stories."  
"I don't like it here."

Her mother laughed, weakly. "Where else is there?"

I spent the first week throwing up, and drinking banana-flavoured rehydration fluids.

The sun turned to a shrunken yellow disc, casting long shadows. Even Jupiter was just a point of light, about as remote from me as from Earth.

There wasn't a human being within millions of miles. A hell of a feeling.

I found it hard to sleep, listening to the rattles and bangs of my Russian life support. I wore my fubar suit the whole time.

I'd aimed for the largest Trojan, called 624 Hektor. At first it was just a starlike point, but it pulsed in brightness as I watched it. When I got a little closer, I could make out its shape.

*624 Hektor*: take two big handfuls of Moon, complete with craters and dusty maria. Mould them into egg-shapes, each a hundred miles long. Now touch them together, sharp end to sharp end, and let them rotate, like one almighty peanut.

That's 624 Hektor.

Nobody knows for sure how it got that way. Maybe there was a collision between two normal asteroids which produced a loosely consolidated, fragmented cloud of rubble, which then deformed into this weird compound configuration: two little worlds, made egg-shaped by their mutual attraction, joined in a soft collision.

It was exhilarating to see something no human had witnessed before. For a while, it was as if I really was Reid Malenfant. I sent a long radio letter to my kid, telling her what I could see.

Maybe that will be the last she'll hear of my voice. Because I was still sightseeing when everything fell apart.

I don't know what went wrong. It happened too fast. My best guess is my reaction control system, little peroxide thrusters, was misaligned. I remembered that ding in the fuel line —

I came in too fast. I tried to turn. I even restarted the fusion pulse drive, but it wasn't enough.

One of the spinning mountains came sweeping up, inexorable, to swat the *Malenfant* like a fly.

Before the impact, I closed up my fubar suit and bailed out.

The solar panels crumpled, and I saw cells tumble away, little black discs the size of my palm. When my hab module hit it cracked open right down a leaky Russian weld. The drive unit kept working, for a while; it lurched away from the surface, spinning crazily. Other fragments were bounced off the surface, the gravity too low to make them stick: pieces of my ship, scattering into trans-Jovian space.

It took a long time for 624 Hektor to reel me in.

I landed like a dust mote. My boots crunched on lightly-compacted regolith. It felt like loose snow.

I walked towards the wreck. The gravity was so low

I kept tumbling away from the ground, as if I was suspended on some huge bungee cord.

*Malenfant* was fubar, as we used to say in the Army: fucked up beyond all recognition. Just as well I had my fubar suit, I thought.

The stars wheeled around me.

The next day it was her mother's turn.

Green Wave, three days old, was an adult herself now, and her growing pains had diminished. Not her hunger, though. And not her anger.

She stood with Churning Wake at the edge of the water, over her mother's body. "Why does it have to be like this?"

"It just is," said Churning Wake.

"But she lived only a few days. In two, three, four days, it will be your turn, Churning Wake. And mine. It isn't right. It isn't enough."

"But it's all we have. It's all there's ever been." He took her hand.

"Like hell."

After a time, he let her hand go.

A Worker slid through the water, its wake oily. It clattered up the curving shoreline of Finger Hall, and loomed over her mother's corpse. It trailed a fine net which was crammed with algae. It raised up a glinting limb, which started to descend towards her mother's body.

Green Wave lunged forward and grabbed the limb. It was cold and hard, its edges sharp. She twisted. There was a crunching noise, and the limb came away from its socket. Green Wave staggered back, breathing hard. There was a steady ticking from somewhere inside the Worker's algae-crusted case.

Sun Eyes grabbed her shoulders. A day older, her brother already looked closer to death than life, she thought.

"What are you doing?"

"Why do they take away the dead?" she snapped.  
"Why do they take away our food? We don't have enough to eat. If we had more to eat, maybe we'd live longer."

He looked doubtful. "How long?"

"I don't know." She struggled with the concept. "Ten days. Maybe twenty."

"Twenty days? That's ridiculous."

The Worker had come forward again, and was sawing industriously at her mother's cadaver. It didn't seem impeded by the loss of its limb.

"You have to let her go," said Sun Eyes.

Green Wave looked at him bleakly.

When the beach was clean of traces of her mother the Worker slid back towards the water. The stump, where she had torn away the limb, trailed cables. The Worker sank beneath the water and began to surge towards the darkness at the end of Finger Hall.

The people clattered back into the water, to resume their endless feeding.

Green Wave, carrying her Worker limb, started to wade along the river.

Churning Wake stood on the bank, watching her. "Where are you going?"

"I want to see where it's taking all our food."

"What about us?"

She laughed. "Come with me."

"No," he said. "This is my place. We only have a few days. It's up to us not to waste it."

That made Green Wave hesitate.

What if he was right? Wasn't she gambling away what little was left of her life? Did she really want to risk it all, chasing the unknown?

Maybe she should take time to think this out.

She looked back at Churning Wake, the ribs poking out of his skinny frame. A new infant came crawling past his bony legs, struggling to stand. It was Sun Eyes' son, her nephew, a grandchild her mother had never seen. His wife was already dead.

There had to be, she thought, more than this.

"Come with me," she said again.

Churning Wake ignored her. He strode into the water and started to feed, with steady determination.

Her brother stood hesitating.

"Sun Eyes?"

"You've been trouble since you were born."

"I'm sorry."

He walked into the water.

Side by side, they waded through the shallow water, feeding on filtered handfuls of algae paste. Before long, the little community was just a knot of motion in the dim light of the distance. Nobody called them back. They walked on into the cold and dark.

The fubar suit is a smart design. I read the Owner's Manual, which scrolled across the inside of my faceplate.

A fubar suit is a miniature life-support system in itself. It has a small plutonium-based power supply, heavily shielded. It is full of nanotechnology. It could recycle my wastes, filter my water, break down the solid residue, even feed me on the blue-green algae which would grow in the transparent, water-filled outer layers of the suit.

When I walked across the surface of 624 Hektor, I sloshed and sparkled green. Neil Armstrong would have hated it.

The suit could keep me alive – oh, for two or three weeks. It's a hell of a technical achievement.

Beyond that timescale, it just isn't practical to preserve a full-scale human being in a closed skin-tight container.

Even so, the fubar suit had fallbacks. More drastic options. Mostly untested; the Owner's Manual said I would be voiding manufacturers' guarantees if I exercised them.

I put it off.

I toured 624 Hektor.

With the low gravity it is easy to bound around the equator of either of the little peanut twins. The curvature is tight; I could see I was on a compact ball of rock, curved over on itself, suspended in space. There are craters, some a couple of kilometres across, as if this was a scale model of Luna. Everywhere I found black, sooty carbon compounds, like a dark snow over the regolith.

I hiked around to the contact region.

624 Hektor is a toy world, but even so it is *big*. I was clambering over a sloping landscape, approaching a hundred-mile mountain that was suspended impossibly over my head, grounded in a broad region of mashed-up regolith and shattered rock.

I lost my sense of the vertical. I actually threw up a

couple of times – me, the great astronaut – but some kind of biochemical process inside my helmet cleaned me out.

I could leap from one worldlet to the other.

My perspective shifted. Suspended halfway between the two halves of the peanut, I got a brief sense that these were, indeed, two miniature planets, joined at the hip. But then the other half of the pair started to open out, into a dusty, broken lunar landscape. Real Peter Pan stuff.

I wished I could show it to my kid.

The Worker surged steadily along the length of Finger Hall.

Gradually the walls opened out around them, smooth and high, receding into the distance. At last they reached a new chamber, much wider and higher than Finger Hall. It was roughly circular, and its roof let in the sunlight. A compact lake lapped at its floor, thick with algae.

There were no people here, but more corridors led off from the rim: five narrow tubes like Finger Hall, and one much broader and darker.

"It's just as they said," Sun Eyes said. "This is the Palm Cavern: the Hand from which five Fingers sprout." He held up his own hand. "Just like a human hand. And look – that larger tunnel is like a Wrist, leading to an Arm –"

"Maybe."

The Worker was heading out of the lake, in a new direction. Towards the Wrist.

"We have to go on," Green Wave said.

"I'm too old for this, Green Wave. Maybe we should go back. Anyhow, nobody's ever been up there before."

"Then we'll be the first."

She took his hand and all but dragged him into the water.

The Worker surged silently along the broader corridor that was the Arm, its roof so far above them – 70, 80 times their height – it was all but impossible to see. There were more Workers here, swimming precisely back and forth along the Arm.

Green Wave and Sun Eyes tired quickly. They were spending so much time just moving, they weren't feeding enough.

The Worker stopped. It was completing small, tight circles in the water, scooping up algae with its trailing nets.

Bringing Sun Eyes, Green Wave moved steadily closer, until the Worker came within an arm's length.

Green Wave grabbed onto the net it trailed. She lodged the detached Worker limb in strands of the net. She helped Sun Eyes get a close grip on the net.

The Worker didn't seem to notice. It wasn't moving so fast; it was easy to hold onto the net, and let the Worker just pull her through the water.

The Worker resumed its steady progress upstream. Some of the net was worn, and she was even able to reach inside and haul out handfuls of algal paste to feed them both.

The walls of the Arm slid steadily past, remote and featureless. On the long beaches there were no signs of people. Maybe, she thought, her own people were alone here, however far this branching series of tunnels and gloomy lakes continued.

Sun Eyes slept for a while. His hair, thinning and straggling, drifted into his eyes; Green Wave brushed it back.

The Worker turned a wide corner, and the river opened out. Now they entered a new chamber, containing a broad, glimmering lake, many times wider than the Palm Cavern they'd seen before. The roof here, far above them, was all but transparent, and Green Wave could see the sun's small disc, and many lesser lights. The water was thick with algae; she merely had to dip her hand in to pull out great fistfuls of sticky paste.

"Fingers," she said.

"What?"

"Fingers. A Hand. An Arm. If that's all true, this must be the Chest. Or the Stomach."

"You don't know what you're talking about," Sun Eyes said tiredly.

"If I'm right, that way must be the Head."

"The Head of what?"

"How should I know?"

In the direction she pointed, there was a broad, dark exit. The Neck? A series of thick pipes snaked out of the lake, and passed into the Neck. There was a system of net hoppers in front of the pipes; the water was greener there, as if richer with algae. Workers clustered around the hoppers, working busily, dumping in algae from their own nets. She pictured some prone giant, sucking nutrient out of this algal hopper in its Stomach.

Sun Eyes clutched at the net. "We're leaving the shore. I can't feel the floor."

It was true. The Worker was forging its way across the lapping surface of the lake; they were already a long way from the curving walls, heading for the deeper water under the high arch of the Stomach roof.

And now there was something new. Something deep under the water. It was a light, flickering, bubbling. No: a bank of lights, in neat rows, stretching off all around her.

"What do you think it is?" she whispered.

"I don't know. I only ever saw lights in the sky."

"Maybe it's another sun, under the water. Maybe —"

But now a hatch on top of the Worker's back was opening up. A limb came looping over, and plucked objects out of the hatch. The objects, dried-up and irregular, were the remnants of Green Wave's mother. The Worker dumped them into the water.

They fell quickly, but when they hit the underwater suns there was a ferocious, silent bubbling.

"So that's what happens to dead people," said Sun Eyes.

"That's what will happen to us."

The hatch closed, and the Worker swam in lazy, broadening circles.

"I'm tired," Sun Eyes said.

She fed him more handfuls of algal paste.

I lay on my back, face up to the stars, unsure if I would ever get up again. I let the nems get to work.

I wish I could say it was painless.

The idea is simple.

The fubar suit has constructed a stable, simplified, long-duration ecosphere inside itself. Most of the volume is just air, but there is a shallow water lake pooling in the suit's back, arms and legs. There is blue-green algae growing in the lake, feeding on sunlight, giving off carbon dioxide — *spirulina*, according to the Owner's Manual, full of proteins, vitamins and essential amino acids. The other half of the biocycle is a community of little

animals, living inside the suit. They are like humans: eating the algae, drinking the water, breathing in oxygen, breathing out carbon dioxide. Their wastes, including their little dead bodies, go to a bank of SCWOs — supercritical water oxidizers — superhot liquid steam which can oxidize organic slurry in seconds. A hell of a gadget. It can even sustain underwater flames; you have to see it to believe it.

Of course you can't close the loops completely. But I was able to plug the suit into the surface of 624 Hektor and supplement the loops with raw materials — carbon compounds, hydrates. It would last a long time.

It's all constructed and maintained by the nems — nano-electromechanical systems, tiny crab-like robots with funny little limbs. The suit is full of them. They're even burrowing their way out into the asteroid surface, in search of raw materials.

I read all about the nems in the Owner's Manual. The technology is neat; the nems are run by chips lithographed by high-energy proton beams, and they store data in chains of fluorine and oxygen atoms on the surface of dinky little diamonds —

I always liked Japanese gadgets.

But I should stick to the point.

*Little guys.* Of course they are like miniature people. What else could they be? They are made out of me.

There's no nice way of putting this. The fubar suit couldn't keep me alive — not as 60 kilogrammes of eating, breathing, excreting woman anyhow. So the nems took me apart.

The nems used my body water to make the lakes, and my meat — some of it — to make the little guys. What's left of me is my head. My head is sustained — my brain is kept alive — by nutrients from the little biosphere that takes up the space my body used to occupy. One day, the theory goes, the medics will retrieve me and will reassemble me, in some form, with more nanotech.

It's grotesque. Well, it's not what I wanted. I'm only 38 years old. I have a kid, waiting for me.

I just didn't have any choices left.

The fubar suit was a last resort. It worked, I guess.

I just wish they'd tested it first. Damn those Japanese.

*Little humans.* They are supposed to look like us, bug-sized or not. They are supposed to be able to move around; the water surfaces in there are doped somehow, so the little guys aren't locked in place by surface tension. They are supposed to breed quickly and eat and breathe and die back, and just play their part in the two-component biosphere, keeping me alive.

What they're not supposed to be is smart. What they're not supposed to do is *ask questions*.

What a mess.

When she woke, she was so stiff it was all she could do to unhook her claw-like hands from the net. Sun Eyes was still sleeping, shivering gently. His scalp was all but hairless now, his face a mask of wrinkles.

She looked around. The Worker was close to the shore of this great Stomach cavern, but it was working its way back towards the exit from which it had emerged.

Time to get off, she thought.

She shook Sun Eyes. His eyes were crusted with sleep. "Green Wave? I can't see so well. I'm cold."

"Come on. I'll get you to the shore."

She helped him disentangle himself from the netting. His legs unfolded from his chest with painful slowness.

At last they were standing, in water that came to their waists. She slid an arm around him, and they walked to shallower water, scooping up algae. Green Wave still carried her purloined Worker limb.

The Worker, apparently oblivious to the loss of its passengers, surged steadily towards the exit to the Arm.

"It's going back," Sun Eyes said.

"I know. We have to go on."

"What for?"

"I'm not sure."

"Where?"

She pointed. "That way. The Head."

They began to work their way around the complex, sculpted shoreline, towards the exit Green Wave had labelled the Neck. They walked in the shallows. They could only manage a slow pace, such was Sun Eyes' condition.

She felt a deep stab of regret. She'd taken Sun Eyes away from where he should be, with his children and grandchildren. And she was old herself now – too old to have a life of her own, too old for children. She wondered what had happened to Churning Wake, if he was surrounded now by splashing children who might have been hers.

They neared the sharp folds in the ground that marked the entrance to the Neck. She could see the big pipes that carried water up from the lake. The pipes were clear, and she could see thick, greenish, rich fluid within. Food, taken away from people who needed it. A diffuse anger gathered.

They walked into the Head.

It was darker here. Most of the light came from the Stomach lake, a greenish glow at the mouth of this broad tunnel.

There was little free water here, little food. But still she urged Sun Eyes on. "Just a bit more," she said.

They reached a pit in the ground, 20 or 30 paces across.

She sat Sun Eyes down, propping him up against a wall.

She lay on her stomach. The pit was pitch dark. It was the first time in her life she'd seen a breach in the floor. Her imagination raced.

She reached down into the pit.

At first she could feel nothing but the smooth flooring. But that came to an end quickly, and below it she could feel beneath, to some much rougher, looser material. It felt damp and cold. There were even algae here, clinging to the walls in clumps.

She could hear Workers doing something, perhaps chewing at the loose rubble down there. Building the pit, onwards and outwards.

She straightened up stiffly. She tried to see deeper into the Head – there were suggestions of vast, sleeping forms there, perhaps an immense face – but there was no light, no free water. She couldn't go any further.

She went back to Sun Eyes. He seemed to be sleeping. She told him what she'd found.

"Maybe there are worlds beyond this one." Her imag-

ination faltered. "If we are crawling through the body of some human form, maybe there is another, still greater form beyond. And perhaps another beyond that – an endless nesting..."

He slumped against her shoulder.

She laid his light, wizened body down against the floor. In the darkness she could feel his ribs, the lumps of his joints.

Her anger flared up, like the light of a new sun.

I know I'm still lying here in the regolith, on this dumb little misshapen asteroid, inside my fubar suit. I know nobody's come to save me. Because I'm still here, right? But I can't see, hear, feel a damn thing.

Although I sometimes think I can.

I'm going stir-crazy, inside my own head.

I know they're coming, though. *The little guys*. The nems told me that much.

They aren't supposed to be smart, damn it!

But the nems will stop them, if I tell them.

So I have a decision to make. I could stop them.

After all, it's them or me.

She got to her feet. She picked up her battered Worker limb, and stumbled out of the Neck, towards the light of the Stomach lake.

She started to batter at the feeder pipes with the Worker limb, her only tool.

The pipes were broad, as thick as her waist, but they punctured easily. Soon she had ripped fist-sized holes in the first pipe, and algae-rich water spilled down over the flooring, and flowed steadily back into the lake. She kept it up until she'd severed the pipe completely.

Then she started on the next pipe.

The Workers didn't react. They just swam around in their complacent circles, piling up the net hopper with algae that wasn't going anywhere any more.

She worked until all the pipes were broken.

She threw away her Worker limb, and lay down where she was, in the slimy, brackish water she'd spilled. She licked at the floor, sucking in a little algal paste, and let herself sleep.

Sometimes I think humans aren't supposed to be out here at all. Look at me, I'm grotesque. These little guys, on the other hand, might be able to survive.

Even prosper.

A hell of a shock for those smug Chinese in the asteroid belt, when a swarm of little Americans comes barreling in from the orbit of Jupiter.

What the hell. It didn't look as if anyone was coming for me anyhow.

Funny thing is, I feel cold. Now, that's not supposed to happen, according to the Owner's Manual.

It was hard to wake up. Her eyes didn't open properly. And when they did, they wouldn't focus.

She lifted up her hand, and held it close so she could see. Her skin was brown and sagging and covered in liver spots.

She got to her feet, and stumbled down the slope.

She stood at the edge of the water, peering at the Workers, until her rheumy, ruined eyes made out one which didn't look quite right. One that was missing a limb.

She struggled through water that seemed thick and resistant, until she had caught hold of the Worker's net, and it was pulling her away from the shore.

With any luck this creature would, unwitting, take her home. She'd be a sack of bones by then, of course, but that didn't matter. The important thing was that someone would see, and maybe connect her with the enriching of the water, and wonder what she'd found.

More would come, next time. Children, too.

They would find that pit, up in the Neck, the way out of the world.

She smiled.

The water was warm around her.

She wondered what had happened to Sun Eyes. Maybe he was somewhere beneath her now, fizzing in the light of those underwater suns.

She closed her eyes. She drifted in blue warmth, her thoughts dissolving.

**Stephen Baxter**, like Greg Egan, is a recent winner of the John W. Campbell Memorial Award – for his novel *The Time Ships* (1995). He lives in Buckinghamshire. His latest novel is *Titan* (just out from HarperCollins/Voyager) and his book before that was *Vacuum Diagrams: Stories of the Xeelee Sequence* (much of which first appeared in *Interzone*).

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Soft Aggie was called Soft Aggie because she had never killed anyone, which in the Red Rag Club on 5th and Turquoise made her practically a nun. She carried a blackjack instead of a knife, and only used it on people who had it coming, which put her on a par with Mother Teresa, who could never visit the Red Rag Club because Long Cool Sarah and Gentleman Pearl had vowed to erase her if ever she walked in through the door. Soft Aggie lived in the Hotel Grozny, and she was always nervous because she owed rent dating as far back as the fossil record. And Soft Aggie was in love with Gentleman Pearl.

Gentleman Pearl was called Gentleman Pearl because that was what she wanted to be called, and no one in Throat City was stupid enough to call her Christabelle, which was her real name. Gentleman Pearl wore a double-breasted pinstripe, with an iridescent blouse, and she carried a blackjack, a knife, a gun, and several other implements of antisocial purpose and vile appearance. Gentleman Pearl was a regular at the Red Rag Club on 5th and

# Love and Turquoise.

Turquoise, where she had carved her name on the bar, two chairs, and the previous owner of the double-breasted pinstripe, a foolhardy man named Marlon Agonistes. And Gentleman Pearl was in love with Soft Aggie.

The problem here was communication. Soft Aggie was a shy, gentle girl from Suburbiton, and when she smiled, it made anyone who was watching think of Tinkerbell and breast-feeding and those odd little white chocolate mice. Her voice was high and clear and made Gentleman Pearl think of satin bedlinen. But in the Red Rag Club, where the jukebox was filled with John Lee Hooker records and the tobacco and gun smoke barged out of the door in a thick carcinogen fog to strut its stuff on the corner of 5th and Turquoise, Soft Aggie rarely said anything. She certainly couldn't speak privately with Gentleman Pearl, who in any case was so rough and toughtalkin' and way above her on the Red Rag social roster that Aggie wasn't sure Pearl even knew she existed. Gentleman Pearl, on the other hand, was a rough and toughtalkin' woman from Throat City, born at the Bulgakov Street cut-price delivery salon. She was thirty eight years old and thought Soft Aggie was the gentlest, sweetest person in the world, and fairly swooned every time Soft Aggie blackjacked someone, that look of regret and sympathy was so divine. As in, the divinest. As in, nothing diviner. But Gentleman Pearl had no idea how to talk to Soft Aggie, who was ethereal, porcelain, and so fragile that Gentleman Pearl was

terrified of breaking her if she touched her.

"It is," Pearl told The One And Only Sam, who owned the Red Rag Club, "torture. It is my karmic ill-doings in a previous existence as a Centurion in the army of Caesar. It is," said Gentleman Pearl, "a bitch."

"As in," agreed The One. He sighed deeply, for he was greatly affected by love stories, having been at one time very much the Romeo. Still, he was more than usually perturbed by these tribulations, having as they did an especial bearing upon his health. Some seven hours before, serving breakfast to the select group of his customers who partook of that abnormal meal, he had given to Soft Aggie a piece of advice which he now perceived to be mistaken, not to say erroneous, not to say suicidal. Unaware of the curious and unhealthy attachment Pearl had formed, he had suggested to Aggie, upon her requesting his opinion, that she might (not wishing to discourage her, rather the reverse, he thought now, but still a less generous or more paranoid individual might take it that way) that she might (and it had been really

# on 5th

only in passing, before he changed his mind, he had been meaning to get hold of her about it) that she might wish to consider the (merest) possibility that Pearl wasn't interested. This piece of information had yet to be imparted to Gentleman Pearl, and The One was thinking now that he might wish to send it by telegram from a safe place, such as Sarajevo or Bogotá.

"As in, the bitchest." Said Gentleman Pearl. The One And Only Sam, looking at her double-breasted pinstripe, was acutely conscious of the painstaking repairs carried out in that exact region of the left panel where the corpse of Marlon Agonistes had been found to have Pearl's name engraved on the chest. Gentleman Pearl, The One recalled, had been rather fond of Marlon Agonistes. He devoutly hoped she was even fonder of him.

Soft Aggie was sitting with Eponymous Jack in the kosher deli on Perspex Lane. Soft Aggie regarded Eponymous Jack, who killed cool people for a living, as the nicest man in Throat City, because he was from Suburbiton like her. Jack, initially horrified by this appalling slur on his name, had made haste to prepare a grisly demise for the girl, only to realize during a botched attempt to forcefeed his neighbour a pair of pruning shears the vast advertising potential in being pleasant to people *all the time*. His bedside manner *qua* assassin had improved radically. It became widely known that Eponymous Jack was the Gaultier of Gore.

Nick  
Cornwell

To be attended to by Jack was the most socially acceptable *coup de grâce*, in some circles the only imaginable way to go. To die at the hands of anyone else was (avert your eyes) *déclassé*. And when Vinnie Vinyl died of natural causes, many of his good friends and all of his society admirers boycotted the funeral to punish him for the *faux pas*. So Jack smiled and bowed and waved languorously and admitted to himself that without Soft Aggie he'd still be just a bouncer at the Red Rag Club.

"It is," said Soft Aggie sorrowfully, "the real thing. She is surrounded by a shining light. I am dumbfounded. Yet to her, I am fishfood. Cannon fodder for the gangs. A piker."

Eponymous Jack gave this his careful consideration, smiling peaceably at her the while.

"Further," went on Soft Aggie, "The One And Only Sam, who I need not tell you is the close confidant of Gentleman Pearl, is of the opinion that my life would be better spent watching cars rust or grass grow, or so he told me this morning over breakfast. The implication is that I have no hope."

"There is always hope," said Eponymous Jack judiciously, crossing his arms over the growing expanse of real estate opportunities which served to encase his internal organs. He smiled at her in a fashion he later described to police as avuncular, and one suspects it may have been this appearance of callousness on his part which triggered the horror that followed. Soft Aggie smiled back, and rose to go. Jack is unable to describe the exact method by which she came in to possession of his Big Guns® Peacemaker, the large and showy slice of contoured mayhem he is wont to use in the execution of his duties, but he conjectures that as she walked away, a woman depressed and trammelled by fate, she took a moment to slap him sharply into unconsciousness with her blackjack, and made off with every item of injurious or violent potential he happened to be carrying at the time. There is about him on such occasions as he tells the tale the glint of a proud father.

The One And Only Sam was taking council with Long Cool Sarah. She had replaced Gentleman Pearl at the bar, and her advice was discouraging.

"There's only one way out of this situation alive," she informed him seriously.

The One And Only Sam looked at her with renewed optimism.

"Dead," said Long Cool Sarah, and made a dull hacking sound so he would realize she was joking. The One And Only Sam was reaching under the bar in search of the sawn-off he kept there for the purpose of such subtle remonstration as he was about to administer to Long Cool Sarah, when Gentleman Pearl dived in through the closed window of the Red Rag Club with bullets flying all around her like tickertape.

"It is Soft Aggie," Gentleman Pearl explained in a lull, from her hiding place behind the pool table. "She has gone completely mad. She walked up to me in the street and told me she loved me, at which I was overjoyed."

"This sounds promising," observed The One And Only Sam.

"As I reached for the words to express the reciprocity of my emotions," said Gentleman Pearl, who had spent a long night with her Pocket English, "she pro-

duced a gun somewhat larger than my car, and proceeded to shoot at me. Hence the situation in which we are now key players."

"This is less so," noted The One And Only Sam.

"Your calm is unnatural," stated Gentleman Pearl ominously, "and after I have killed this crazed bitch whom I hereto believed to be a sweet and innocent passerby, you and I will have an accounting, for I perceive your hand in this fiasco." So saying, Gentleman Pearl stood up to return fire, and the lush stillness of the falling doodlebug settled quickly over the Red Rag Club on 5th and Turquoise.

Gentleman Pearl stood, mouth open, staring towards the street. Soft Aggie lounged in the doorway, clutching enough death to open a chainstore. Pearl looked at her, waif-like and pure, rageful bandanna slipping slightly down over one mascara-smeared eyelid, and could not maintain her anger.

"As in," murmured Gentleman Pearl appreciatively.

Soft Aggie stared back at the object of her desire, stylish and pinstriped even in this moment of extremis, lamé blouse dusted with cordite and torn at the navel. Aggie gave a *move* of desire and desperation, and shot Gentleman Pearl smartly in the chest. Pearl fired back. As an afterthought, she shot The One And Only Sam as well. Long Cool Sarah took advantage of the confusion to plug Teilhard Abelard and exit Ringpull Debbie, and before long it was just another shootout at the Red Rag Club.

Sirens wailed in Throat, where medical knowledge is the only guarantee of safe passage. In this city where gunshot wounds are more common than cigarette machines and growing up is one long series of minor stabbings, to be a doctor or a paramedic is to wear at all times the armour of the just. To be on the safe side, Vito Jehovah, the surgical graffiti artist, also wore kevlar. Vito was known throughout Throat as the man who had etched Marilyn Monroe on Vinnie Vinyl's appendix and drawn the Cat in the Hat under Hangdog Lucy's tongue when she was asleep, and he walked unafraid and anaesthetized out of his apocryphal mind through the firefight on 5th and Turquoise, and emerged on 4th and Aquamarine carrying two sorely injured women. Gentleman Pearl and Soft Aggie were locked in a kiss so tight Vito thought he might have to perform a tracheotomy just to relieve the vacuum. He bandaged and sutured, bailed frantically to get the grue from their bilges, shot them full of antibacterials and antivirals and antidepressants, and pronounced them alive on arrival. And he decorated them just a little, to keep in practice. So when Pearl and Aggie awoke in the Hotel Grozny, it was to find that Aggie had a small portrait of Pearl tattooed on her shoulder, and Pearl's stitches bore a suspicious resemblance to a heart with "Aggie" written on it. Since Vito, as a doctor, was immune to all but the most trivial reprisals, they accepted the situation with outward grumbling and secret delight.

Soft Aggie and Gentleman Pearl were an item.

**Nick Cornwell** is 24, lives in London, and grew up reading Damon Runyon and laughing at Charles Addams's cartoons. "Sober individuals have suggested that this explains a lot," he says. The above is his first story to appear in print.

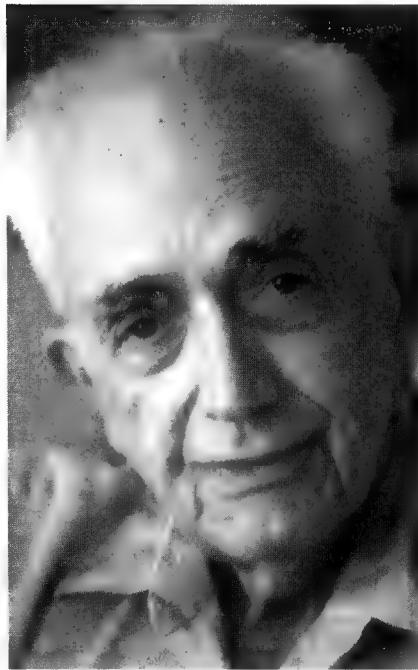
# FRITZ LEIBER

*Brian Stableford*

Fritz Leiber, Jr. was born on Christmas Eve, 1910. The son of a Shakespearean actor, he was – as he put it in one of his confessional essays – “born into a backstage world.” The essay in question, “Not Much Disorder and Not So Early Sex,” goes on to characterize that backstage world in terms of the ever-presence of pretence, illusion, performance, tolerance and instability. Perhaps it is not surprising, therefore, that Leiber never quite settled into his life or into his work. He never became certain of exactly who he wanted to be or exactly what he wanted to do, and never fitted in. His literary works span the entire range of imaginative fiction – and played a key role in developing some of its brighter lines – but he never adapted himself to any kind of regular production. His creativity proceeded in fits and starts, punctuated by silences which may have been as much a cause as an effect of his periodic alcoholism.

Leiber’s one long-running series – the sword-and-sorcery epic which tracked the adventures of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser – was strikingly unlike any other exercise in its subgenre. On genre fantasy bookshelves it sits alongside dozens of segmental series whose episodes are hacked from the same crude template, almost all of them extended for purely commercial reasons, but Leiber’s series is much more various and much more personal. It provides a kind of running commentary on his life, mapping his moods and his fortunes. Towards the end of his career – after he had formally acknowledged the crucial identification in the first of his confessional pieces, “Fafhrd and Me” – the series was no longer a map but a manifest extension of his being: a magical product of the alchemy of words; a second shadow.

Leiber began writing in earnest in the mid-1930s, not long after graduating from the University of Chicago and shortly before he married the English poet Jonquil Stephens. Some



of his earliest works were published in *The Churchman* and reprinted in 1983 in a pamphlet produced by the small press Cheap Street, entitled *In the Beginning*, but the first truly substantial story he wrote was “Adept’s Gambit,” a tale of Fafhrd and the Mouser. It is difficult to understand, now, how such a fine story could have failed to find a market but in that era there was a dark and wide abyss separating the upmarket regiment of “slick” periodicals from the downmarket carnival of the pulps. Fantastic fiction belonged almost entirely to the pulps, where fast action was the over-riding priority, to the extent that wit, wisdom and delicacy of style constituted a positive handicap.

Leiber received some crucial encouragement after Jonquil wrote to H. P. Lovecraft on his behalf (he was too shy to do so himself) late in 1936. Although their correspondence was brief – Lovecraft died in 1937 – it justified the endeavour which had gone into “Adept’s Gambit” and gave Leiber a new outlook which was to make it possible for him to carry for-

ward his career.

It is difficult for modern readers to understand the strange role which H.P. Lovecraft played within the small community of writers that gathered around him. He had been offered the editorship of *Weird Tales* but had turned it down – wisely, as it turned out, for he undoubtedly accomplished far more by allowing Farnsworth Wright to maintain the magazine’s readership base while appointing himself its conscience, preaching his own gospel to the cream of its contributors. Lovecraft encouraged his disciples to submit and sell to *Weird Tales* while constantly testing and stretching its limitations. He encouraged a mind-set whereby the writers in his coterie regarded “Farny the Fox” as an adversary to be outwitted, tricked into publishing work that was far more adventurous and far better than pulp convention demanded.

Despite the brevity of their acquaintance Leiber took that attitude aboard as fully as any other member of the Lovecraft circle, and kept it until the day he died, applying exactly the same logic to his dealings with other editors. Ironically, the market where the policy paid the least dividend, in his case, was *Weird Tales*; the most popular of his early sales to that outlet was “Spider Mansion” (1942), written in a rebellious spirit as a derisive compound of all new editor Dorothy McIlwraith’s favourite clichés.

The posthumous publication of *The Dealings of Daniel Kesserich* has allowed modern readers further insight into the nature and quality of Leiber’s early work. Although the jacket copy of the 1997 Tor edition claims that the novella was drafted in 1936 its plot-design is remarkably similar to William Sloane’s *To Walk the Night* (1937), which was one of very few upmarket American novels of the 1930s to borrow a device from pulp science fiction. Sloane’s novel was sufficiently successful, both critically and commercially, to prompt its author to produce the similarly-structured

tured *The Edge of Running Water* (1939), and it is easy to understand how its example might have seemed inspiring to a young writer reluctant to accept that the only remaining milieu for serious and daring imaginative fiction was the pulp ghetto.

*The Dealings of Daniel Kesserich* is an ingenious and striking adaptation of the notion of time travel which addresses the phenomenon of time with the same daring and ambition that H. G. Wells had brought to *The Time Machine* and "The New Accelerator." Had there been a ready market for it, Leiber's career might have developed very differently, but had there been a ready market for it American science fiction would have had a very different history. As things were, Leiber had to await the advent of another man with great ambitions for the sophistication of pulp imaginative fiction – one who was bold enough to lead from the front rather than operating as a back-seat driver.

Why John W. Campbell, Jr. did not take *The Dealings of Daniel Kesserich* for *Astounding* remains a mystery, but he did begin taking new and more calculatedly-formulaic tales of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser for *Unknown*.

Accepting that the pulps would have to be his market, Leiber soon produced a ham-fisted science-fiction story called "They Never Come Back" (1941), but he was convinced that his talents were better suited to the production of weird fiction. His first authentic literary triumph was "Smoke Ghost" (1941), in which he attempted to design an apparition uniquely appropriate to a modern urban and industrial environment. The smoke ghost was only the first such *genius loci* in a career-spanning sequence; others were to include "The Girl with the Hungry Eyes" (1949), "The Black Gondolier" (1964) and the "Belsen Express" (1975).

A similar careful re-configuration of the fantastic is displayed in Leiber's first novel for Campbell, the classic *Conjure Wife* (1943; in book form 1953), which imagines that scientific disenchantment and technological control of the world are quintessentially male achievements, while females have retained a very

different way of thinking and *modus operandi*. Even within the groves of academe, campus wives routinely protect their husbands' careers with black magic – and the anthropologist who demands that his wife must put away such childish things exposes both of them to the full fury of her rivals' cruel vindictiveness.

Had Campbell not been so adamant in his belief that the future of fantastic fiction lay with science fiction and not with fantasy (a judgment which Leiber doubted, as *Conjure Wife* makes very evident) Leiber might well have stuck to fantasy – but Campbell's prophecy became self-fulfilling when he reacted to the threat of wartime paper shortages by killing *Unknown* and reducing the size of *Astounding* (thus making it feasible to retain a monthly schedule while his competitors were forced to

reduce their periodicity). This ploy increased Campbell's power to shape the evolution of American sf, and removed fantasy from the genre marketplace for



25 years – a judgment whose commercial wisdom has been called spectacularly into question by the rapidity with which fantasy achieved sales ascendancy over sf once it was allowed back into the arena in the 1970s.

Like *Conjure Wife*, Leiber's first science-fiction novel can be seen as a perverse inversion of Campbellian orthodoxy. In a future America subdued by Oriental conquerors, who have dressed their technology in the deceptive trappings of religion, the

resistance embraces the counter-trappings of Satanism and the watchword which gave the novel its title: "Gather, Darkness!" (1943; in book form 1950). The war for the liberation of future America thus becomes a war of stage magic in which everyone is playing a part with melodramatic gusto. The novel's method provided Leiber with a means of getting to grips with the apparatus of science fiction, with which he never became truly comfortable; his work in that field was to become a series of bold theatrical productions, his own situation that of the backstage organizer of special effects and director of performances.

Unfortunately, the laborious experience of writing "Gather, Darkness!" also proved to Leiber that he was simply not fluent enough to make a living as a pulp hack. He went to work for Douglas Aircraft, and later became the assistant editor of *Science Digest* – an ideal situation for a reluctant science-fiction writer, in that it compelled him to keep up with interesting developments and force-fed him with story ideas. He sold one more short novel to *Astounding – Destiny Times Three* (1945; in book form 1957) in which three alternative histories

must do battle for the privilege of occupying the historical stage – but wrote little else for several years.

In 1947 Arkham House issued the collection *Night's Black Agents*, including the first publication of "Adept's Gambit," and Leiber soon began writing again. Ambitious to escape the limitations of the pulp ghetto, he produced his own small-press magazine *New Purpose*, which began serialization of an avant-garde contemporary novel. He also redeveloped a story he had begun for *Unknown* but had abandoned when Campbell axed the magazine: a baroque existentialist fantasy whose hero attains a problematic freedom after discovering that the vast majority of

humans are mere automata reciting destiny's script. The times were not yet ripe, however; the former item petered out, although the extant text ultimately formed the basis of *The Green Millennium* (1953), and an abridged version of the second was diverted to the downmarket Ziff-Davis pulp *Fantastic Adventures*, where it appeared as "You're All Alone" (1950). To add further insult, the full-length

version was bought by a paperback company even further downmarket than Ziff-Davis, whose editor inserted several passages of crude pornography before releasing it, in an almost-invisible edition, as *The Sinful Ones* (1953).

Leiber followed up the sale of "You're All Alone" with other sales to the Ziff-Davis pulps, including the offbeat novella "Let Freedom Ring" (1950) and the hauntingly sentimental "The Ship Sails at Midnight" (1950). When he expressed a tentative desire to write for *Astounding* again John W. Campbell immediately fed him the plot of "The Lion and the Lamb" (1950), one of very few tales in which Leiber tried to operate within the kind of framework that Isaac Asimov's "Foundation" series was on the point of establishing as the standard backcloth of 1950s sf.

Campbell also offered Leiber the story-idea which L. Ron Hubbard was ultimately to incorporate in "To the Stars" (reprinted in book form as *Return to Tomorrow*), but Leiber was not ready to serve as a committed player on the Campbell team and he turned it down. Instead – like Theodore Sturgeon and other *Astounding* writers unhappy with the degree of control Campbell was now ambitious to exert upon them – Leiber turned his attention to the new-born *Galaxy*, which seemed to offer far more scope for testing and extending the limits of the genre. His first publication there was the classic "Coming Attraction" (1950), in which the aftermath of a nuclear war has given rise to a dystopian society in which everyone must operate as a masquerader.

While John W. Campbell followed the unfortunate precedent set half a century earlier by H. G. Wells, abandoning open-minded exploration of a whole spectrum of possible futures in order to concentrate on what he considered to be the most likely and most desirable course of future affairs, *Galaxy*'s Horace L. Gold – who did not like sf enough to want to guide its evolution – retained a blithely cynical suspicion of futurological tunnel-vision. Leiber took glad advantage of the freer rein offered by Gold, producing the relaxed moral fantasy "Nice Girl with Five Husbands" and a sequence of quirky cautionary tales reflecting contemporary anxieties about the advent of the atom bomb and the dangers of McCarthyite intolerance:

"A Pail of Air" (1951), "The Moon is Green" (1952) and "A Bad Day for Sales" (1953). He also began to write for *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, but no sooner had "The Silence Game" (1954) appeared there than his productivity foundered on the rock of a heavy drinking spell.

Leiber got his career back on track in 1957, taking up where he had left off in producing stories that became increasingly adventurous and increasingly quirky.

His next breakthrough came in 1958 with two substantial pieces set against the background of the "Change War": a millennia-spanning war fought across a vast multi-verse of

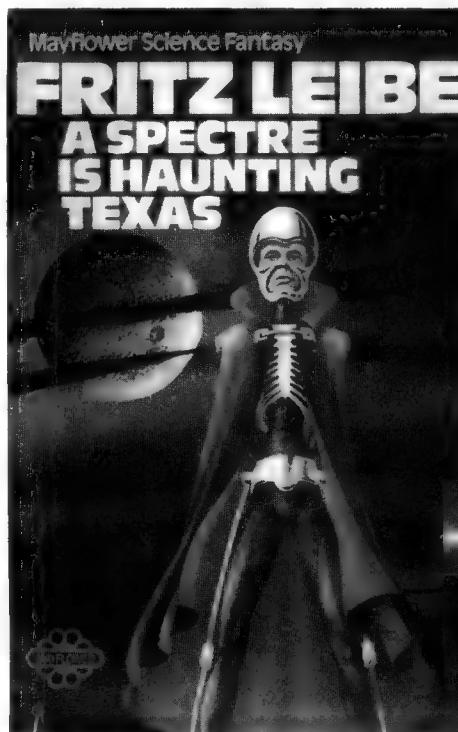
ceptive in identifying writers of startling originality and considerable ambition long before anyone in the wider literary world was prepared to acknowledge their existence. There is no better evidence of this than the fact that a writer of Leiber's class and distinction was given no less than six such awards, and that the first went to a work of such unrepentant idiosyncrasy that the deeply puzzled Horace Gold was only persuaded to buy it by junior editor Frederik Pohl's insistence that it was a masterpiece. Alas, Gold failed ignominiously to learn the relevant lesson and he rejected Leiber's next long story, a breezy comedy about romance and literary life among robots, *The Silver Eggheads*; it appeared eventually in *Fantasy & Science Fiction* in 1958 and was expanded for book publication in 1962.

Between 1949 and 1958 Leiber had accepted that if he wanted to be a professional writer of fantastic fiction he had to couch his work – however loosely – as science fiction, because that was the core of the marketplace. He had produced only a handful of

weird tales and only one sword-and-sorcery story during that decade, although some of his stories – especially such *Fantasy & Science Fiction* vignettes as "When the Last Gods Die" (1951) and "The Big Trek" (1957) – were highly unusual exercises in futuristic surrealism. In December 1958, however, the editorship of the Ziff-Davis magazines *Amazing* and *Fantastic* was assumed by former assistant editor Cele Goldsmith, who had

ambitions far beyond those of her predecessor Paul Fairman.

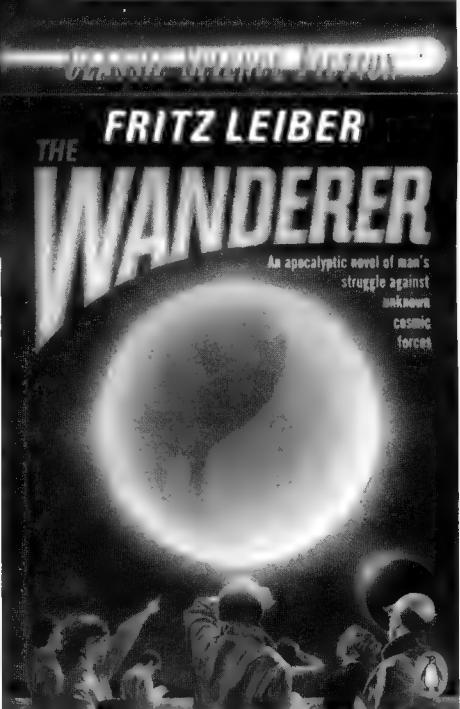
Fairman had run *Fantastic* as a virtual clone of its companion, mostly featuring stodgily conventional work mass-produced by Robert Silverberg and Randall Garrett's "fiction factory." Goldsmith wanted to have another shot at fulfilling the magazine's original purpose: to provide a showcase which would champion the cause of the kind of fantasy which was reduced to playing second fiddle in *Fantasy & Science Fiction*. When Leiber sent her "Lean Times in Lankhmar" – a new tale of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser, much lighter in manner and more heavily ironic than any since "Adept's



alternative histories by two mysterious parties known to their human mercenaries as the Snakes and the Spiders. One of these stories was the extravagantly bizarre "A Deskful of Girls," the other the Hugo-winning short novel *The Big Time*.

The latter work is, in essence, a stage play rendered into occasionally-poetic prose. The story's one and only set is a "recuperation station" – i.e. a brothel – isolated from the space-time manifold by a dimensional warp. The plot revolves around the identification of a camouflaged instrument which is required to save the station from explosive destruction, but this is a mere dramatic device to add tension to a remarkable set of virtuoso performances.

It is sometimes argued that the Hugo awards are mere popularity contests propagating the parochial values of an introspective fan community, but they have often been remarkably per-



Gambit” – she proposed that he write her enough stories to fill an entire issue, displaying the whole spectrum of effects that she was now ambitious to achieve. Delightedly, he obliged, and the November 1959 issue became an all-Leiber showcase.

From then on, Leiber produced tales of Fafhrd and the Mouser on a regular basis. He revamped a novel he had begun in the 1930s as the novella “Scylla’s Daughter” (1961), which was subsequently re-expanded into the novel *The Swords of Lankhmar* (1968). He also developed another novella, “The Lords of Quarmall” (1964), from a fragment that had been written in the 1930s by Harry Otto Fischer, the old college friend whose correspondence had originally put names to the two characters and established the pattern of their relationship.

By this time the economic heart of the science-fiction genre was in transit from magazines to paperback books. Ace reprinted *The Big Time* back-to-back with a short story collection, *The Mind Spider and Other Stories*, in 1961, and was later to reprint more of Leiber’s short fiction in *Ships to the Stars* (1964), but the most prestigious paperback sf line was that issued by Ballantine. It was Ballantine that published the expanded version of *The Silver Eggheads* in 1962, followed soon afterwards by *Shadows with Eyes*, which was marketed as a collection of weird tales.

By this time Leiber was ranging freely across the whole range of fantastic fiction. 1962 saw the production of a prophetic tale in which a chess-playing computer causes problems for tournament grandmasters, “The 64-Square Madhouse,” a similarly prescient account of miniaturized computers, “The Creature from Cleveland Depths” (1962; also known as “Lone Wolf”), the surreal and hallucinatory “The Secret Songs” and a tale of the young Gray Mouser, “The Unholy Grail.” It must, however, have been obvious to Leiber that the future lay in books rather than in writing for the magazines. Although he published another dozen short stories in 1963 plus the heartfelt theatre-set novella “No Great Magic,” the bulk of his effort over the two years was diverted into a long novel for Ballantine: *The Wanderer* (1964).

The plot-structure of *The Wanderer* is much more conventional than anything Leiber had done before, being modelled on a well-known recipe for bestseller production. It is a multi-viewpoint disaster novel, which tracks events following the sudden appearance in the solar system of a rogue planet, whose gravitational pull causes earthquakes and unprecedented tides on Earth and destroys the moon. In the climactic section an American rocket pilot reaches the invader and receives an account of its origin and purpose from the catlike

alien Tigerishka, which broadens the vision of the tale dramatically. That broadening helped the novel win Leiber’s second Hugo but probably put paid to its potential as a genre-breaking bestseller. Ballantine issued two more sf collections, *A Pail of Air* (1964) and *The Night of the Wolf* (1966), and also secured Leiber the contract to do the authorized novelization of a new Tarzan movie, *Tarzan and the Valley of Gold* (1966), but that was his last attempt to become a wholeheartedly commercial writer.

After another drinking bout – which helped to produce the marvellous alcoholic fantasy “The Winter Flies” (1967, initially as “The Inner Circles”) – Leiber was tempted back to the Ace fold when Donald A. Wollheim offered to put the entire Fafhrd and Gray Mouser series into book form. Wollheim insisted that Leiber provide a novel to kick the series off and a number of connective links to fill in certain obvious gaps in the heroes’ biographies, but this proved to be congenial work. The first four volumes of the series appeared in 1968 but there was a hold-up occasioned by the fact that the stories collected long ago in the Gnome Press volume *Two Sought Adventure* (1957) could not be liberated immediately for incorporation into *Swords Against Death*; that volume eventually appeared in 1970 along with the prefatory *Swords and Deviltry*, whose heart-rending final sequence, “Ill Met in Lankhmar” (1970), was deeply affected by the death of his wife in September 1969.

Alongside the linking sequences he was producing for the paperback versions of the Fafhrd and Gray Mouser series Leiber had written one more novel for book publication: *A Spectre is Haunting Texas* (1969). Yet another tale of exaggerated theatricality, it involves a gravitationally-challenged actor in a political revolution against the rule of the hormonally-enhanced Texans who rule future America. Leiber probably found its broad satire more congenial than the action-adventure format of *The Wanderer* but the audience did not; it is generally thought to be the least of his novels, although it is crafted as well as any. Although the ingeniously-designed sf/fantasy hybrid “Ship of Shadows,” published the same year, won a Hugo as best novella it looks suspiciously like an incomplete novel that was hastily adapted for use in a celebratory special issue of *Fantasy & Science Fiction*. If it was, the repercussions of Jonquil’s death presumably put paid to any chance it ever had of being completed.

Leiber was slow to recover from the blow which his wife’s death inflicted, whose absorption took the form of another bout of alcohol abuse. It was not until the mid-1970s that his work began to recover its energy and vital-

ity, and not until 1977 that he began to produce long stories again. In that year he completed the Fafhrd and Gray Mouser adventure begun in “The Frost Monstreme” (1976) with the short novel *Rime Isle*, which was swiftly reprinted – with some supplementary materials – in *Swords and Ice Magic*. He also published a fine full-length novel about metropolitan apparitions, *Our Lady of Darkness*.

Leiber was to produce one more sword-and-sorcery novel before he died, which was incorporated with other materials into *The Knight and Knave of Swords* (1988), but all the other books he published after *Our Lady of Darkness* were collections, most of which added one or to recent stories to assemblies of older materials. He produced hardly any science fiction after *A Spectre is Haunting Texas*, and it is arguable that only the relatively weak “Black Glass” (1978) properly falls within the margins of the genre. To some extent, this reflects the fact that the marketplace made it much easier to follow his own wayward inclinations, but it also testifies to the diminution of his powers – he was, after all, in his late 60s when he wrote *Our Lady of Darkness*. Relative economic security and a proper measure of critical appreciation came far too late to give him new heart. He died in 1992.

It is tempting to suggest that if only the editors who took Leiber briefly in hand had handled him more appreciatively and stuck by him more loyally he might have drunk less and written more, but that may not be true. There are writers who work best in adversity, producing their best works when they are trying hard to prise narrow cracks of opportunity further apart. It is conceivable that in a more open and benevolent marketplace Leiber might never have written a single *bona fide* science-fiction story – but it is highly probable that had the marketplace always been hospitable to sword-and-sorcery stories Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser would soon have been reduced to mere commercial products, never subject to the intensities that made “Lean Times in Lankhmar” and “Ill-Met in Lankhmar” uniquely brilliant.

It may seem slightly paradoxical to argue that such fine science-fiction novels as *The Big Time* and *The Wanderer* could only have been written by someone who would have been far happier writing something entirely different, but it is probably true – and that, alas, is why we will never see their like again. The genre has lost the brief monopoly that John W. Campbell won for it, and all the privileges that went with it. Fritz Leiber’s involvement was one of those privileges and the peculiar artistry of his best science-fiction stories is one of the most valuable prizes in the genre’s trophy cabinet.

Brian Stableford

Those believing that typos hold deep and Freudian significance nodded knowingly at the Fripp PR flyer for this ghastly-sounding video *Tony Blair—The Road to Victory*. “It looks at the man behind the politician, his robots, his upbringing, his faith and his family.” Are those clanking servitors constrained by the Zereth Law of Robotics?

## IN A PETRI DISH UPSTAIRS

**Arthur C. Clarke** has been battling hard against natural modesty to tell the world about his February 1997 fan letter from the Dalai Lama: “Your short story titled ‘The Nine Billion Names of God’ was particularly amusing.” Well, he would say that, wouldn’t he?

**Harlan Ellison** hinted that he might sue US publishers St Martin’s Press over his inadequately fulsome entry in the *Fantasy Encyclopedia*.

**John Grant** had an awkward moment when the Public Lending Right office rang up and asked why his PLR claim for a children’s retelling of *Frankenstein* didn’t allot a share to Mary Shelley.

**Jane Johnson** of HarperCollins was bemused when a *Financial Times* chap phoned her to ask probing questions on the *Fantasy Encyclopedia*. After being duly polite about rival publishers Little, Brown, she found to her vast embarrassment that the *FT* review credited HarperCollins with the book and quoted Jane as the driving force behind it.

**Gabriel King** is the collaborative pseudonym of M. John Harrison and Jane Johnson, for a children’s book mainly about cats.

**Terry Pratchett** is constantly beset with bright ideas for Discworld spinoffs which will enrich other people, a repeated suggestion being a *Magic*-style “collectable card game” which I like to think of as *Rincewind: The Gathering*. But Pratchett polled his fans on the net, and the verdict was thumbs-down. “I have to say that I regard CCG with mild loathing, but I’ve had enough approaches for me to question my own judgement. Now I’ll turn down future approaches with a light heart.”

**George Turner**, grandmaster of Australian sf, died on 8 June without recovering consciousness after a stroke on the 5th. He was 80, an established mainstream novelist who began publishing sf in his sixties with the solidly crafted *Beloved Son* (1978), and won the Arthur C. Clarke award for *The Sea and Summer* (1987; US *Drowning Towers*). Aussiecon 3 was determined to honour him despite his worries about living that long, and will not be replacing him as a 1999 Worldcon

## ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

**Guest of Honour.** After the crowded and tearful 11 June funeral in Melbourne, Turner sprang a last surprise on his publisher/editor/fan friend Bruce Gillespie: “Panic! What the hell does a literary executor do? Why, George, why?”

**Gene Wolfe**, some people say, does not hold US critic Gregory Feeley in high regard as a reviewer. But it must be sheer coincidence that Wolfe’s *Exodus from the Long Sun* (constrained by a naming system whereby males are called after animals or animal parts) makes a point of dragging in a reference to a proverbially carping, fault-finding critic called Feeler.... Meanwhile, the Long Sun odyssey is to have a follow-up “Book of the Short Sun,” featuring the destination planets Blue and Green: working titles are *On Blue’s Waters*, *In Green’s Jungles* and *Under the Long Sun*.

## INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

**Publishers & Sinners.** Simon & Schuster UK have hastily changed the name of their coming (1998) “Spectrum” sf/fantasy imprint to “Earthlight,” because “Bantam Spectra in the USA were worried that the names might be confused.” But does the celebrated author of *Earthlight* worry that the names might be confused?

**Beyond the Pale.** The e-zine *Urban Dreams* runs a “metafiction” contest, whose liberal rules of entry exclude only the two vilest literary forms imaginable. “No science fiction. No pornography.”

**Hordes of Awards.** *Bram Stoker Awards* for horriblest horror ... Novel: Stephen King, *The Green Mile*. First Novel: Owl Goingback (Donald Fine), *Crota*. Novelette: Thomas Ligotti, “The Red Tower.” Short: P. D. Cacek, “Metalica.” Collection: Thomas Ligotti, *The Nightmare Factory*. Nonfiction: S. T. Joshi, *H. P.*

*Lovecraft: A Life. Life Achievement: Ira Levin, Forrest J. Ackerman. Mythopoeic Fantasy Awards, 1997* novel shortlist: John Barnes, *One for the Morning Glory*; Patricia A. McKillip, *Winter Rose*; Nancy Springer, *Fair Peril*; Terri Windling, *The Wood Wife*; Gene Wolfe, *The Book of the Long Sun*. (The children’s novel category was suspended this year.) *James Tiptree Memorial Awards* for “gender-bending” sf went to Mary Doria Russell, *The Sparrow*, and Ursula K. Le Guin, “Mountain Ways.”

**Net Junk.** 1997 saw a small Hugo controversy (Not Many Dead) when the fanzine *Nova Express* sent mass e-mail shamelessly offering free copies to drum up Hugo votes. This mailing was cannily restricted to potential voters, the Worldcon membership list being available on-line; addresses were lifted from the “Fan E-mail Directory,” explicitly published as *not* for bulk-mail use. More generally annoying were multiple e-mail bombardments promoting the web presence of something called “Sphere Fantasy,” which included the immortal sentiment: “I am hoping that with better contact, we can create a closer nit community on the net.” A self-fulfilling prophecy? Meanwhile, argument continues over possible future Hugo nomination of the tastefully titled web magazine *Sci-Fi Weekly*, whose commercial aspirations and repeated public claims of effective-circulation figures in excess of 22,000 would seem to put it among the tough competition of the professional “Best Editor” Hugo category. (Professionalism, by Hugo rules, starts at 10,000 copies.) The *SFW* editor, though, strenuously insists that his own figures should be interpreted in a Pickwickian sense and the magazine placed in the rather less competitive “Semiprozine” lists. This one will run and run.

**Thog’s Masterclass.** “It was not a cancer on the face of Darkover, but a strange and not unbeautiful garment.” (Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Heritage of Hastur*, 1975) [CW] ... “I felt a smile climbing my mouth but I pulled it down.” ... “I was hollowed-out. A ballbearing rolled around and around where my innards should be.” ... “An impulse guided my hand to my manuscript and my legs to frog leap high in the air.” ... “The submerged apocalypse tossed and turned in its uneasy sleep.” ... “His eyes were trapped on the far side of his music.” (all John Shirley, “What He Wanted,” 1975) ... “In fact, the sight of her made me feel a little queasy and I started to walk back out when her eyes opened, nailing me to the floor.” (Jay Russell, “Lily’s Whisper,” 1996) ... *True Romance Dept*: “As his eyes bulged, so did his cock ...” (Nicholas Royle, “The Comfort of Stranglers,” 1996)



## PART TWO

**The story so far:** In 1965, Geordie lads Bob and Terry enlisted in the army. With their new-found mates, Stan Butler, Billy Casper and others, they endured basic training under the fearsome Sergeant Grimshaw, then were sent off to fight the USSA-backed communists in Indo-China. Now it is 1967, and Bob is back home in England, while Terry has vanished, mysteriously and in disgrace. Bob, trying to come to terms with his nerve-shattering experiences, has written a book about the war – retitled *It Ain't Half Hot, Mum* by his agent's assistant, Joseph Orton. Film rights have been sold to producer Schmuel Gelbfisch, and director Micky Powell has been appointed to make the movie...

"I'm going to be played by Rodney Bewes?"

Bob had sort of been hoping for someone like Albert Finney. Rodney Bewes was the star of *Wish You Were*

Here, a television series set in a Morecambe guest-house run by Thora Hird (his mother-in-law) and wife Rita Tushingham, dreaming of a better life than cooking miserly fried breakfasts and rationing the toilet-paper.

"Yes," said Powell. "He was recommended by the screenwriters, Clement and La Frenais. Ideally I'd have wanted Imre, but our relationship is still a little, ah, encumbered by the past. You should know about that. Still, Clement and La Frenais have done an excellent job."

They sat in a bare office at Pinewood Studios. Rusting, metal-framed window, several layers of bland, green paint over the brickwork of the walls and flaking off a big, barely-warm radiator.

"For Terry, we have a young man named James Bolam. Also an actor from the television, I believe."

Powell was no longer the rude, shabby old man in the Cotswold cottage. In a sharp suit, he was as abrasive as ever, but every courtesy seemed part of a relentless drive towards some distant but attainable goal. He



## Kim Newman & Eugene Byrne

was just like John Barrymore in *The Red Shoes*.

"Aye, I think I know him," said Bob. "Little bloke. Terry is big and coarse. This fellow has the right accent, mind. I suppose he'll do at a push. Is it too late to get rid of Rodney Bewes? There's Albert..."

Powell smiled. "Now, for Thelma, we've got Brigit Forsyth."

"Thelma! You can't put her in the film! I only mentioned her a few times in the book. It doesn't seem decent, bringing personal business in like that."

If Powell put Thelma in his bloody film, her Dad would probably belt him. Bob would lose the house in the divorce settlement.

"How is that charming girlfriend of yours, by the way?"

"You mean Diana? I'd've thought you could tell me, Micky. It's a while since I've seen her."

"Oh," said Powell, wistfully. "I took her to a press do in Wardour Street a couple of weeks ago. Last I saw of her she was talking to a trendy young director with mutton-chop whiskers and a spotty hankie tied round

his neck."

Bob had been at the same party. Diana had wandered over to say hello, given him a peck on the cheek and ran off with her director, who wanted to put her in something called *Devil Bride of Dracula*. He couldn't honestly say he was too upset; he'd been out with four women (an actress, a painter and two models) in the last month.

"Now we've got Reg Varney to play Butler," said Powell. "He's a little on the old side, but he can put a lot of cheek into it. Hartnell's a little long in the tooth as well, but I have to have him for Sergeant Grimshaw."

"You've cast *Dr Who* as Grim! Micky, that man was a monster, a bloody psychopath with stripes. Not some doddering old eccentric."

"Padre Noote will be played by Derek Nimmo."

Bob smiled. "Now that's good. Nimmo for Noote is spot-on, Micky."

*Oh he is now, is he?*

"But, err..."

"But what, Bob?"

Tell him, kidder. Tell him how that chinless clown of a sky-pilot turned out to be the best man in the battalion.

"Noote wasn't just a caricature. He was a very courageous man."

"Don't worry," said Powell shuffling through sheets of paper, scribbling his initials on some.

Bob was at Pinewood as a technical adviser. He'd been there two days showing the extras how a British soldier wore his kit and how to slouch the right way. For this, he was getting an exorbitant 150 per week, with 15 of that to Kenneth Halliwell. He'd been shocked to find the jungle sequences would all be shot in the studio.

A knock at the door. "Come!" snapped Powell. A woman came in, dressed from neck to toe in an immense fur costume. She held more fur under her arm.

"Want to see this now?"

Powell nodded. She put the fur thing from under her arm onto her head. She was a giant teddy bear.

"Jump up and down a bit," said Powell.

The teddy bear did as it was bid.

"Good," said Powell. The woman took off her bear's head. "Is it easy to move around in?"

"I'll use nylon for the fur," she said. "Cheapest and lightest. It'll be uncomfortable under the lights. You'll need to damp everyone down between takes."

Powell sniggered. "Let 'em suffer for their art. Run off two dozen. All different styles and sizes. Make some of them quite battered. Miss out the odd ear and eye. They should look as if they've been loved for a long time."

"All in shades of brown?"

Powell gave her the thumbs-up. She left.

Bob didn't know quite what to say. "The Viet-Cong dress in black pyjamas, generally, Micky."

Bob had long since given up asking to see the script. Powell kept making excuses.

"I said your book had no magic in it," said Powell. "Well, I may have been mistaken. I managed to find some."

"I still don't get it. Why teddy bears?"

"You will."

Another knock at the door. A bespectacled woman clutching a clipboard popped her head in.

"Just thought I'd let you know, Micky, that the young man from the Lord Chamberlain's office is still waiting outside. You've kept him for seven hours, now."

"Poor little lamb," he said. "What's his name?"

She consulted her clipboard. "Puttnam."

"Puttman. Good."

"No, I said Putt-Nam."

"And I said Putt-Man. Make sure it gets spelled that way on all correspondence. Shall we let him in?"

The woman shrugged.

"Go on then."

She left.

"Bob, for the next ten to twelve weeks I'm going to be doing one of the most stressful jobs in the world. If I get more than four hours' sleep a night, I'll be lucky. The reason I'm not going to show you a script is that I don't want to have any more arguments than are strictly necessary."

"I understand, Micky, but..."

Powell stared him in the face. The intense stare of an

angry headmaster.

"Good. Now I need a big favour from you. The usual drill with the Lord Chamberlain's office is that you show them a completed film. If they want anything cut, they ask for it. Things are a bit different with me. Ever since I made *Peeping Tom*, I've been on the blacklist. I get my own personal censor for the duration of principal photography. You don't have a huge amount to do on the set all day. I'll get someone to let you know which days you'll be needed. For the rest of the time, I'd be greatly indebted if you were to keep young Puttman as far out of the way as possible. Give him *la vie Bohème*, take him to parties, introduce him to loose women. Bloody hell, try and get him addicted to black bombers or the white mischief. Only thing is, there's a restaurant near here called *Les Oiseaux*. For God's sake, don't ever take him there. I promise you, Bob, by all I hold dear: the more you keep this cretin out of my hair, the better our film will be."

His shoulders started to shake. It was a moment before it became clear he was laughing.

"Not that I've got a lot of hair any more. Ah, young Mr Puttman from the Lord Chamberlain's Office! Come in! Come in! I want you to meet Bob..."

*The official version is that 1400 men surrendered at Khe Sanh. Actually, on the day Major Lampton, the highest-ranking surviving officer, ran up the white flag, I'd say that there were about 2,000 of us left, though a lot of them were stretcher-cases. Of the original garrison of 8,000 I've no idea how many were killed or wounded, but it was a lot.*

*When the situation became hopeless, we took advantage of three mornings of exceptionally heavy fog to try and scuttle the place. The Raf, the Army and the Navy threw in every aircraft they could. While the bombers and fighter-bombers tried to keep the enemy artillery busy, helicopters and light aircraft zoomed in, filled up as fast as possible and got out again. Regular Dunkirk, it was. Orders were to abandon everything but helmets and flak-jackets and just get aboard.*

*The Loamshires – us – were to hold the perimeter, along with a West African Commonwealth unit and a few companies of Gurkhas. We were bitter about this. Three Para had been got out, as had the Greenjackets, the Somerset Light Infantry, Princess Wallis's Own Royal Borseshires and most of the gunners and engineers. The powers-that-be decided a mixed bag of non-Brits were expendable. And us? One of the blokes in the platoon, Eddie Booth, put into words what we were all thinking: "We've been tossed in so's the f\*\*\*ing government isn't seen to be saving the white cream and just leaving the wogs."*

*"Well, they've bloody left me, white honky," said Eddie's best mate Bill Reynolds, who came from Jamaica. Strange pair, Bill and Eddie. They used to insult one another's skin-colour all the time, but they were inseparable.*

*It was our bad luck to be in an unfashionable foot-and-mouth regiment that didn't have anyone fighting its corner in Whitehall.*

*We wondered where the ARVN were. It was their bloody country we were fighting for, after all. The word was that most of them were so useless top brass didn't*

want them in the way. But the big question is where were the Russians? The Russian Air Force would have been big enough to provide plenty of cover and helicopter more of us out. It seems HM government was too proud to ask for help, but we heard a whisper they actually refused a Russian offer of help. Was a little national humiliation too much to ask to save hundreds of lives and hundreds of men from the horrors of captivity?

Day four of the evacuation dawned bright and sunny. A few wokkas tried to come in, but without cover it was hopeless. Three were shot down and only two made it out again. The next day was the same, only I got promoted to lance-corporal. The day after the enemy were on top of us anyway. We surrendered.

Captain Vinh was tall for a treen – five foot ten, maybe six foot. He wore a spotless olive-green uniform, unembellished by insignia. Only the red star on his pith-helmet broke the anonymity. And the livid purple scars on the left side of his face.

Vinh noticed Bob was trying not to stare.

“Does my face offend you? My unit was attacked by your British Air Force two years ago, just North of the Demilitarized Zone. I lost a lot of comrades.”

“I’m sorry,” said Bob. A mistake: rule one of interrogation was to keep it polite, but neutral. Give away no information, no emotions, no nothing.

Vinh looked him in the face, nodded slightly and offered a cigarette from a red-and-white packet. There were three other men in the room, guards with American-made Garand rifles. No cameras. Bob accepted the cigarette and a light.

Noote warned against pictures of the NVA being nice to their captives. One tab might make Bob a propaganda snapshot: see how nice we are to the European imperialists?

The interrogation room was half the interior of a wooden hut on bamboo stilts. They weren’t in a prison-camp as such, but an ordinary village the NVA had taken over and fenced in with barbed wire for the temporary storage of prisoners. They’d been split into smaller groups. Just two companies of the Loamshires were billeted here. He was still with Terry, Butler and Casper. And Noote, who was the CO.

The cigarette tasted surprisingly good. American Virginia tobacco. Two draws on it and Bob felt quite light-headed. It’d been a week since he’d last had a smoke.

Vinh consulted a buff folder on his desk. There was a single sheet of paper in it.

They’d all been kicked around by the guards, and by civilians when they were being marched here. They were fed more or less regularly – rice and bits of vegetables. Everyone had the shits of course.

“Lance Corporal, Second Battalion, Loamshire Regiment,” said Vinh. His English had a heavy American accent. A lot of NVA officers had studied at American universities.

Bob said nothing. Name, rank, serial number, date of birth. That was all you had to give them.

“I understand everybody calls you ‘Bob?’”

Bob tensed. How had he found that out? Probably no big deal. Captain Vinh was “interviewing” everyone. Someone probably dropped his name in an unguarded moment. Or had it beaten out of him, more like.

“You come from an industrial area of England? Many people work in factories, often in unhealthy and unpleasant conditions.”

Bob tried to look pleasant and accommodating without saying anything.

“Your government conscripts its working men and sends them to the other side of the world to burn the homes of peasants, to bomb women and kids. Bob, you have studied at night-school to better yourself. You are, I am sure, an intelligent man. Have you ever asked what in tarnation you and your, ah, mates, are doing here?”

*Aye, you’re right enough there, Captain Vinh. How the hell do you know all this about me, Captain Vinh? Who’s been blabbing?*

Vinh turned suddenly and banged his fist on the table.

“Why are you in Indo-China?”

Bob shrugged.

“Let me level with you, Bob,” said Vinh, sounding all reasonable again. “You can’t give me any military intelligence. The entire active strength of the second Loamshires was captured. I’m not interested in what platoon or company you belong to, or your tactics or weapons or operating procedures, or any of that shit. All I want is the answer to that one question. It’s not for my superiors, it’s just something I cannot understand, something that keeps me awake. Why the hell are working men from Britain oppressing working men in Indo-China?”

Terry would have said “that’s the British working man all over, Captain Vinh. Can’t resist a scrap.” But Terry always had to be carried away from interrogations.

Bob shrugged.

“Bob, do you want to go home?”

Bob nodded. No point in lying.

“Here’s some literature.”

He pushed leaflets across the desk. Pictures of British PoWs getting off a plane in Switzerland. The catch was that they had to sign a statement condemning British imperialism in South East Asia. And embrace international socialism, and convince the treens you meant it.

“Thank you,” said Bob. He’d wipe his arse with them.

“You have a good think about it, huh?” said Vinh. “I know some of your comrades are certainly considering this offer very carefully.”

*Though he walked with the aid of a stick since “Vimto” Vinh broke his ankle, Lieutenant Noote lead the morning stroll around the camp. I fell in with Terry, beside the padre, ambling along. Butler – just out of the cage after a week’s punishment – leaned on Casper, who hadn’t spoken to anyone in months. Whistling through cracked lips, we made a racket out of “Colonel Bogey.” Behind us, Eddie Booth and Bill Reynolds had suspended their colour-prejudiced bickering to poke fun at our yellow captors. “Ugly little treen f\*\*\*ers,” they muttered in agreement. Water dripped from the thatch of the huts, and gushed out of the nearby trees. There had been a hell of a storm the night before.*

*Noote greeted each guard personally, calling him by the nicknames that had been agreed on.*

"Good morning, Herman. Good morning, Prof. Good morning, Gertie. Lovely weather we're having. Lovely for ducks, that is."

The guards grinned humourlessly at the absurd Englishman, hobbling with pride as if he ran the camp.

It was Noote's idea to give all the guards nicknames to rob them of their dignity. It made us less afraid of them. He organized a series of meetings to democratically elect names for all the goons, and to establish routines.

Noote, of course, was Escape Officer. Early on, he had gathered us all and announced "I'm asking each hut to appoint a representative to the Escape Committee. We also need an adjutant, an intelligence officer and a quartermaster. You're QM, Butler. I've got you marked as a scrounger who can rustle up larcenous miracles. We have to take a crack at getting some men over the wire soon, because the longer we wait the more beaten-up and malnourished we're going to get. We can't be more than five or six days' march from the Demilitarized Zone. With the Lord on our side, we stand a fair chance of making a home run. What we need to do is pool our resources. Think about what kit you have, and about what you know, what skills you have, what information you might possess. It's all for one, here."

I wasn't entirely sure about Noote's optimism. This wasn't Colditz, with tunnels and Red Cross parcels and forged papers. But it was true that we had a fair bit of equipment; with a few days' warning that we might be captured, every man had concealed something useful. Razor-blades were sewn into trouser turn-ups; rat-packs, maps and water-purification tablets stuffed into jacket-linings; compasses hidden in boot-heels; groundsheets tucked away in waistbands; cigarette lighters, pencils and pocket-knives shoved up where the sun don't shine.

This morning, the padre was chipper. The storm had knocked down several stretches of wire in the night, and none of the guards were making any effort to repair the perimeter. It was clearly time to put Plan Wooden Horse into action. It involved no subtle deception. Simply put, the plan was to break through the wire and walk to safety. The only clever part was that Noote would spend hours running the remaining prisoners around the village so energetically that a head-count was impossible.

The observation tower leaned on three bamboo stilts, battered by the storm. There was no one manning it and the machine gun had fallen down and been carried away.

Terry and me had drawn lots and were ready for the go. Butler had scrounged the compass out of a broken penknife, and we were kitted out with a hand-drawn map on the back of one of Vinh's propaganda leaflets, a lighter and six cigarettes (for burning off leeches), a groundsheets, two sachets of vegetable soup and four Durexes.

"A, err, prophylactic appliance in a sock makes a very serviceable water-canteen," Noote had explained. "In the jungle, you can't risk drinking river or stream water if you can avoid it. Collect rain from the plants."

"They never taught us about rubber Johnnies in the Scouts," said Terry.

Now, with everything soaking wet, there was a rare surfeit of potable water.

"The Lord is conspiring," Noote commented.

It was nearly time for the break. With double rations in my belly to build my strength, I felt stuffed rather than nervous. Terry was eager, dancing a little like a boxer.

Butler sat down, exhausted, unsupported.

I saw Billy Casper wheeling around, arms outstretched and flapping, tweeting scratchily. The kid had been acting like that for a while, turning his head like a bird, squatting everywhere as if perching.

"Good man," Noote said, assuming this was a diversion.

Casper climbed the rickety tower. Guards gathered around, shouting up at the prisoner, their language as birdlike as his screeches. Rifles were raised.

Terry and me drifted towards the wire.

Casper spread his arms in an "I can fly" gesture, and the tower collapsed under him. He pulled himself into the air, stretching. For a moment, it was as if he really could fly. He would soar above the village and flap lazily over the jungle, migrating to freedom.

Gertie the guard shot Billy. He fell to Earth like Icarus, broken.

Terry was ready to go, but I froze, staring at Billy's dead face. He was just a kid. A crazy kid.

"Come on, kidder," Terry said.

I couldn't move. My nerve was shot.

Captain Vinh marched up. Noote said, "Captain, I wish to protest most strongly at this atrocious..." Vinh swatted the padre to the ground with a backhand. Then, he drew his revolver and shot Noote in the head, twice.

"There will be no escape this morning," he announced. "Bob, Terry, bury your dead."

Vinh's adjutant had brought shovels. He couldn't stand up straight, couldn't lie down properly. All he could do was crouch. Any attempt at stretching brought him up against bamboo and barbed wire. Bob had been in this little cage, roasting by day, freezing by night, for half a week. The pain wasn't usually physical apart from the times you got cramps. But it was still agony. He wanted to scream, give Vimto whatever he wanted. Terry was in the other cage, within sight.

"Times like this I wish you were a woman," said Terry, making calf-eyes through the wire.

"I wish I was a bloody woman," said Bob, "then I wouldn't bloody be here."

When every scrap of him wanted to chuck it, Bob would think that if Terry was taking it, so could he. They recited Newcastle United squads from all the years they'd been following the team. They sang songs together, always the filthiest versions.

"My old man said go to Viet-Nam,  
I said 'fuck off, bollocks, you're a cunt'."

In the dead of night when the guards were asleep, Bob and Terry talked about those shovels Vinh had brought for them to bury Casper and the Lieutenant. Vimto had known about Plan Wooden Horse. Someone was being talkative.

When fear and pain and despair set in, there was always hate. Only their hut had known more than half an hour before that Wooden Horse was a goer.

They had a traitor among them. Someone had grassed them up.

If it wasn't Bob or Terry – and, since Bob froze, he

was petrified Terry would think it was him – and it couldn't have been poor Billy Casper because he was no longer able to talk, which left only be one man.

Bob and Terry realized at exactly the same moment who the traitor was.

"I hate you, Butler," Terry breathed.

Terry (James Bolam) was being interrogated by Captain Rambo (Raymond Massey), the American Communist agent who ran the camp, issuing orders to the NVA and Vietcong.

"Absurd Englishman," Rambo said, in close-up. "You force us to such things. But then, the British have always been the world's fools. You are like children who will never leave the nursery, who still have rules about telling tales, who want to cry but can't be seen with tears on their faces. Oh no, mustn't show emotion, mustn't 'let the side down'."

White leader ran across the screen, flashing scribbles and blips. Lights came up in the projection room.

"Ray is spot-on, isn't he?" said Powell, cheerfully. "It was difficult to get a sufficiently eagle-faced Yank. In the old days, Imre and I would have used Barrymore, but poor John's drunk dead."

Three weeks into filming, these rushes were the first Bob had seen of *It Ain't Half Hot, Mum*. He'd been busy keeping the man from the Lord Chamberlain's Office out of the way. This evening, Puttnam was off at the ICA, watching a fashionable new movie from America, *Seven Brides for Seven Comrades*. Bob had tried hard to appreciate these left-wing art movies, but still preferred British comedies or Italian police thrillers.

"Do I have to tell you I never saw any Americans in Indo," said Bob. "Plenty of American guns and shells, but no actual Americans."

"I know, I know," said Powell, "but it's an article of faith among our political masters that the enemy war effort is directed from Debs DC. This is horse-trading. Little Puttman appreciates a splash of transatlantic evil. It's funny: he's supposed to be the guardian of good taste and morality, but he came over all excited yesterday and insisted we shoot a scene where Rambo forces Butler to play Russian Roulette. My Rambo would never do that."

"Did you have to give Rambo all the best lines? He's obviously your favourite character in the film."

"Balance, Bob. You have to make your villains a little heroic and your heroes a little villainous. It adds spice."

Bob felt out-manoeuvred.

Everyone else in the projection room left their seats. About half of them clustered around Powell wanting decisions, signatures, orders.

"Have you eaten?" Powell asked Bob. "Hang around and we'll go to *Les Oiseaux*. Restaurant near here, run by a chap who used to make films before the War. Kept falling foul of the censors and had to pack it in. I want to talk about the scene we're doing tomorrow, where Terry murders the traitor."

Bob was aghast. "That's not in the book."

Powell smiled, eyes hard. "Ah, but it should have been, shouldn't it?"



*Butler cradled the broken Billy Casper in his arms, tears*

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pouring down his cheeks, sobbing.

"You didn't 'ave to do that," he said to Vinh. "Billy was just a kid. Poor little sod had gone soft in the 'ead."

I couldn't see which of the guards shot Stan. He fell backwards, a look of peace on his face.

Terry and I crawled close.

I remembered Butler from Walmington-on-Sea, a million years ago. The spivvy lad who could always get fags and sweets, who could recite bus routes like scripture, who laughed like Sid James.

That lad was dying.

Terry held his hand. Vimto stood over us, sneering contemptuously.

"Don't cry, lads," Butler said, "I'm goin' 'ome. I'm drivin' the number 42 straight to the Cemetery Gates."

He died smiling. Butler squirmed against the wall of the hut, tears pouring down his cheeks, sobbing.

Terry and Bob crawled close.

Butler didn't try to deny or explain or justify himself. Most likely, he'd sold them out because he couldn't stand the idea of being put back in the cage. Maybe he did it for chocolate or extra ciggies.

"I never did like cockney cunts," said Terry.

Butler snivelled.

Terry held his throat. Bob concentrated his hatred, focusing, willing Terry's fingers to be strong.

There was a loud crack as Butler's neck snapped. Inside the hut, it sounded like a gunshot.

"That's done the bastard," Terry said.

"Ey, look here," muttered Bob. "He's got three packs of tabs and a bar of chocolate stowed in his corner."

Terry spat in Butler's dead face.

INT. HUT. NIGHT.

**BUTLER** sits, waiting, dead inside. Monsoon rains pour down, rattling in the thatch. The door opens. **TERRY** and **BOB** stand in the doorway, water pouring off their coats. **BUTLER** has been expecting them, he is almost relieved.

**TERRY**

You know why we're here, Stan. You know what we have to do.

**BUTLER**

In your shoes, I'd do the same. I'm just so sorry. For everything.

**BOB** watches as **TERRY** steps towards **BUTLER**. He doesn't understand the bond between the two men. **BUTLER** opens his arms in a cruciform pose. Water and moonlight makes his face beautiful. **TERRY** gently places his hands around **BUTLER**'s neck.

**TERRY** (with love)

I hate you, Butler.

**BOB** shuts his eyes. We hear the rain pouring down. **BUTLER** doesn't struggle. **TERRY** lays him out on his cot, at peace. **TERRY** wipes **BUTLER**'s face.

**BOB** (v.o.)

In the end, everyone wanted Butler dead, himself most of all. The prisoners, the guards, his mates, his enemies. Even the jungle wanted him dead. There'd be no medals for Terry, but he was a hero all the same. Through the noise of the storm, we hear helicopters. And music: "Teddy Bears' Picnic."

"Good eeee-vening," said the restaurateur. He was an immense, jowly man with a deep, rich London voice. "If it isn't Micky Powell!"

"Alfred, you old devil," said Powell. "How are you?"

Alfred shrugged. "Come and have the best table, chum."

In the taxi, Powell had explained that Alfred had also been a director, rising from "quota quickies" at about the time Powell had done. Bob remembered many of the films he had done: *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, *Fanny By Gaslight*, *The Trouble With Harry*, *The Third Man*. Like Powell, Alfred was blacklisted on the strength of a single picture. *Nutter* cast the Lithuanian star Larushka Skikne as a young man who keeps the mummified corpse of his mother (Margaret Rutherford) in the attic of his boarding-house in Skegness. "They never forgave him for the scene where Sylvia Sims is murdered in the bathing machine," Powell said. Crucified by critics, bishops and politicians, Alfred quit the business.

"This restaurant is my way of getting my own back," Alfred said as he showed them to their table. "To my certain knowledge, I've killed two MPs and three clergymen, not to mention that dreadful woman. Let me get you a wine list."

Bob sat down. As befitted a restaurant near a studio, the walls were covered with framed film stills. It took him a while to realize Alfred was in all the pictures, often peeping out from behind the scenery.

Powell chuckled. "The queer thing is, I don't think he's joking..."

"Sorry?"

"About killing people. Alfred was ruined by do-gooders and God-botherers. No one's ever proved anything, of course. He was questioned by the police a few years ago. This ghastly suburban woman – Whitewash? Whitewall? – started a campaign to get piano-legs covered, that sort of thing. Wanted to clean up smutty movies. Said *Brief Encounter* was immoral and undermined the family. J. Arthur tried to calm her down by inviting her to the studios, giving her the VIP treatment. He made the mistake of getting *Les Oiseaux* to do the catering. Three days later, she was dead of a 'mystery stomach bug'. I hope you like poultry and game-birds. That's Alfred's speciality. Shall we order?"

After three excellent courses, during which Powell had astounded Bob with funny stories about famous actresses he had slept with, the coffee arrived and Powell's eyes turned to neons again.

"Now, about Terry and Butler," he began.

Bob writhed in his seat, coffee gritty in his mouth.

"You can't show Terry killing Butler. They've both got families."

Powell smiled, sharp teeth showing.

"Every time you see an extra with his kit slung incorrectly, you whine. Whenever we combine or manufacture characters to distil a greater truth from the morass of reality, you complain. And yet, you lie throughout your book. And you feel threatened when we diverge from your lies to tell the truth."

"You weren't there, you don't understand."

"No, Bob, I wasn't and I don't. But you were there, and you don't understand. You have no excuse."

"Thelma was reading the manuscript over my shoulder as I was typing it. There were things I couldn't put

in the book."

"Did you write the book for Thelma?"

"It's dedicated to her."

"Why not to Terry?"

"You know... what he did afterward... the terrible thing. Some say he's no better than a traitor himself."

"Some? Do you?"

Bob took another swallow of coffee. It wasn't helping. He had scuppered Plan Wooden Horse, by freezing up. He hadn't killed Butler, but let Terry do it for him. And, in Fotherington-Thomas's compound, where severed heads were kicked about like footballs, he had lost it again.

"When you came to visit me in Avening, I told you there was a great dishonesty in the book. What I'm trying to do is squeeze that out of the film. Sometimes, that involves making up things that didn't happen. Sometimes, it involves showing things that will upset Thelma and people's families and the bloody Church of England. Now, Bob, are you with me or against me? Can I count on you for the rest of the shoot, or do I have to ask Alfred to whip up one of his special cream desserts for you?"

Bob didn't know.

"I have no time for politics," said Powell, running a huge cigar under his nose. "But the way I see it, your friend Terry is being the honest one. Fancy a brandy?"

"I haven't seen him since. I called on his parents. His Dad's disowned him. Yes, please."

"He could have changed his name, gone to earth, maybe moved to another country."

"But your film, Micky, is going to make it worse for him. He'll never be able to get on a bus again without worrying that one of Stan Butler's mates will recognize him."

Powell shook his head. "Your unfinished business with your friend is between you and him, Bob. Nobody else."

He was right, of course. Even in rare moments when he was being civil, Micky Powell had a way of making Bob feel a total wanker. He was like a combination of Captain Vinh and Terry.

There was a commotion at the door. A small man in an immaculately-cut overcoat stormed in like a raging bull.

"Mee-keey!" he yelled through a jet-black beard, "Mee-key Powell! Wonderful news!"

Powell rose and engulfed the little Sicilian in a hug.

"I am so happy," said Scorsese. "I have been to see Gelbfisch," he crossed himself, "he like rushes. He say you get extra 20 thou for the, you know..." He made circular motions with both hands.

"Helicopters?" suggested Powell.

"Helicopters! Si! All helicopters you need! Is great news, no?"

Vinh was incandescent with fury. All the prisoners were lined up as if for inspection. His reasoning was that since the head-count was one short and he knew no one had breached the perimeter, someone was playing hide-and-seek.

"Very well. If Butler does not show himself within ten minutes, I shall have one of you executed."

Bob and Terry looked at each other.

All night, they had scabbled at the soft earth under the floor of the hut, digging not a tunnel but a grave. The idea had been that Vimto would assume Stan – strengthened by that extra chocolate and driven insane by guilt – had escaped into the jungle.

Vinh was waving his Colt .45.

Minutes passed. Some of the weaker prisoners sagged. Others got fidgety.

"Stan Butler, come out, come out," yelled Vimto. "Olly-olly-ox-in-free!"

"He'll be half-way to Saigon, by now," Terry said.

Vinh marched over, furious, pistol cocked.

"Or Hanoi," Terry allowed. "He was a bus driver. Terrible sense of direction."

"Escape is not possible."

"Captain, do you really think one of your guards would put it in his report if he fell asleep at his post?"

Vimto obviously had thought of that, but couldn't afford to lose face. Only the prisoners would suffer now. Later, he was quite capable of having some 16-year-old NVA peasant shot as well. The Captain put the muzzle of the gun to Terry's nose, and grinned.

"Not so uppity, eh?"

Terry stared the treen down.

Bob heard something. A boom, off away in the distance, like far-off thunder. He thought it was panicked blood pounding in his ears, but he realized Terry and Vinh heard it too, and were distracted from their face-off.

It was a thrumm, now. Like a gramophone played too loud three doors down, rattling ornaments on the mantelpiece, but too distorted to make out the tune. There was just a throbbing bass line.

Vinh, strangely, was struck afraid. He backed away from Terry and looked up into the sky, clutching his gun as if it were a lucky charm.

*Dum-dum-dum-dum-dum-dum-dummm-dum...*

It was music. Ominous oom-pahs. Someone laughed in surprise. Vimto shot him in the knee.

Bob recognized the tune as the words cut in.

"If you go down in the woods today," sang Henry Hall...

"It's the bloody 'Teddy Bears' Picnic,'" said Terry.

Accompanying the song was the slicing of helicopter rotors. Vimto was issuing orders in rapid Vietnamese to scurrying guards. Bob's stomach sank. Anything that scared Vinh's boys was not necessarily good for the prisoners.

The music filled the air like a hailstorm. Bob felt it in his teeth.

*Tum-te-tum-te-tum-te-tum-te-tum-te...*

"Look!" said Terry, pointed.

Above the treeline were ten helicopters, in a loose vee formation. Westland Wessexes and Scouts. The music came from loudspeakers mounted over their cargo doors.

Some of the prisoners started waving their arms and dancing for joy. Rescue was at hand.

Vinh shouted orders up to the observation tower. For a moment, Bob was certain he'd have the machine gun rake the exercise ground and massacre the prisoners. Instead, the gun was pointed at the sky.

Some of the men were singing along.

Bob found himself humming, *dit-dit-de-de, dit-dit-de-*

dum...

Something flared from the lead wokka, burning a trail across the sky, imprinting a neon squiggle on Bob's eyeballs.

"Everybody down," Terry yelled.

Henry Hall – mainstay of *Children's Favourites*, hosted on the BBC Light Programme by Uncle Mac throughout the halcyon decade of Bob's childhood – whispered thunderously, as the delicate sounds of his band drowned out explosions and gunfire.

The rocket detonated in the observation tower. Guards and the gun exploded out of the fireball and rained around in flaming chunks.

Today was the bloody day, the day those sodding teddy bears *finally had their fucking picnic!*

This was not a day anybody wanted to be in the woods.

The guards started shooting the prisoners. A bullet spanged in the dirt between Bob and Terry. They rolled backwards, towards a hut.

Machine guns opened up from the helicopters, stitching across the village at random, killing as many prisoners as guards. Bob realized this was not a rescue mission. The men in the helicopters probably didn't realize they were attacking a prison camp. Everyone who died was a treen. That was how you knew one Indo-Chinese from another. The ones you killed were the enemy.

Eddie Booth and Bill Reynolds jumped up and down and waved in the middle of the carnage, trying to signal the wokkas. The machines circled the village, machine-gunning and firing missiles.

Everything was on fire.

Terry had swiped a rifle from a dead guard. Bob knew he was looking for Vimto. But this was Indo-China. You didn't kill who you wanted to, you killed who you could.

Terry shot a jabbering guard.

Bob felt burning thatch fall on his legs. Terry dragged him out of the fire.

"I owe you, our kid."

"I'm paying you back for that Stanley Matthews cigarette card."

There was an explosion, very near. Eddie Booth was tossed up in the air and came down in flames. It was no use. The wokkas were going to blitzkrieg everyone and everything. They were going to die.

"Terry?"

"Aye?"

"When you went out with Thelma, you know, for those two weeks."

"Forget it."

"But did you..."

"Yes."

Bastard, Bob thought. "I forgive you," he said.

"So do I."

Then the shooting stopped. A xylophone sounded in the song's middle-eight. Crackling fires spread. A few people were moaning.

Bob and Terry were still alive.

The helicopters touched down, rotors slowing. The music faded.

A rotund officer, wearing a panama hat over earphones and cricket-pads over khaki drills, jumped out,

accompanied by a small mongrel dog and juniors with guns. He strode straight under the whipping scythes of the rotors, towering over men who bent double. Pausing, he took a deep breath, and said, "I love the smell of burning flesh in the morning. It tastes like... *cooked breakfast.*"

*We soon realized the man who had stepped out of the sky was Major Nigel "Mad Nye" Molesworth of the Long Range Jungle Patrol Group. Terry was greatly dis-chuffed to discover the LURP hadn't made a special raid to rescue us.*

*What they'd seen from the air was a couple of hundred yards square of empty jungle – our exercise ground – that was the nearest thing they'd find to a cricket pitch this far up the Ulu. They even parked two of their helicopters at either end to act as sight-screens for the bowlers. Apparently, it was Sunday, and Molesworth always played cricket on Sunday. He wasn't going to let a little thing like the Indo-China War break that habit. He even insisted on breaking for tea at four sharp, and served cucumber sandwiches with the crusts cut off. He had a standing order with Fortnum and Mason's Hong Kong branch.*

*Terry and I were too exhausted to complain. We weren't the only survivors; of the 200 or so of us there, perhaps 50 had been killed or injured, and a few of the guards had disappeared into the jungle to chance the snakes and their own punji traps.*

*So we sat there and watched the cricket. Molesworth ordered two of the helicopters to ferry survivors back to our lines south of the DMZ, starting with the most urgent casualties.*

*Molesworth quickly fixed on the tall and athletic Bill Reynolds, reckoning that any West Indian must be a born cricketer. He was right. Bill was a demon bowler and a handy batsman. Terry and me had always reckoned cricket was for nancies – not a proper game like football – though we both kept quiet about that. Molesworth's Gurkha wicket keeper had a necklace of human fingerbones.*

*Lieutenant Darbshire, the bespectacled medical officer and the nearest thing to a sane man in the unit, got us to help him out collecting identity discs from the dead.*

*"This Noote sounds VC material," he commented.*

*Late that afternoon, with Captain Jennings at the bat, an enemy patrol found us. Some of the guards must have got through to make a report. The treens could hardly miss a load of helicopters and two dozen white-clad Ruperts hitting a ball around the jungle. They opened up with small arms and grenades. Molesworth ordered the machine-gunners to keep them at bay while the last few overs were played. I revised my opinion of cricket. Or decided that nancies were a lot harder than we had thought.*

*Jennings was bowled out and, since his side needed 30 off two overs to draw level with Molesworth, gracefully conceded. Molesworth considered it and accepted. I knew damn well he'd have liked to play it out to the end.*

*We realized that all the other survivors had been ferried out by now. Terry, Bill Reynolds and me were the last Loamshires left. We had no choice but to go along*

with the LURP.

Molesworth was the last aboard the bus. He strolled over to the machine Terry and me were in, bat slung over his shoulder, stumps under his other arm, pads flapping in the downdraft from the rotors. He sat down next to me and unbuckled his pads. Over the racket of the engine, the door-gunner pumping tracers into the jungle below. This time, the loudspeakers were playing "Nellie the Elephant."

"The Mekon don't play cricket," he shouted to me, "chiz chiz."

Bob had realized within moments of setting foot on the sound stage that he came at the absolute bottom of the pecking order. Having written "the original book" made him of considerably less interest to grips and extras than, say, being the lad from the canteen who brought down the tea-urn and biscuits.

After two months of shooting, he had learned to blend in with the many busily-employed people whose jobs were hard to define. Sometimes, he would be called on for an opinion that would, likely as not, be ignored or overruled by Powell. Very occasionally, he was palmed off on some journalist or television interviewer down to do a story on the film.

Putnam had gone native and joined the effects crew. He was merrily sloshing buckets of kensington gore over people. Powell was sneakily getting shots of the man from the censors with blood up to his elbows. He was shooting ridiculously violent scenes that he would willingly sacrifice during the inevitable arguments over final cut, just so he could get away with the things he really wanted to keep.

They really did use tomato ketchup. Every time Powell shot a battle scene, the set smelled like a chip shop.

*I love the smell of burning flesh in the morning...*

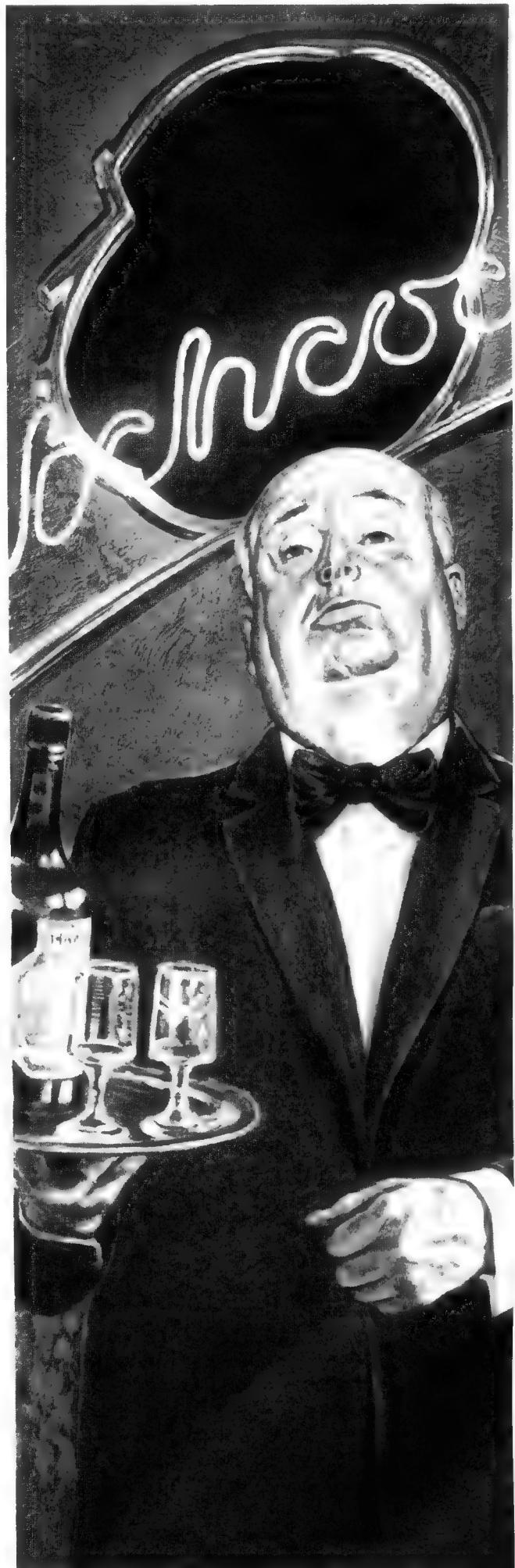
Bob shuddered.

At first, he had worried that he wouldn't be able to stand watching the filming. He still wore his commando knife and had nightmares. Everything had associations that took him back: noises, sights, smells, phrases.

Though the actors had real-looking guns, they made only the feeblest of pops when they were fired off. Bob understood that the rat-tat-tat sounds were added later by Dino DiCampo, the foley artist. As Rodney Bewes and James Bolam ran across the stage for the dozenth time, stepping between pre-set firework charges, firing their toy guns into the air, Bob was taken back not to Indo but to the Waste Ground where he and Terry played war as kids. The actors were doing the same thing.

He felt an almost physical ache for what was lost. They had played British and Germans. Or, during the War of 1956, British and Egyptians. Then, after they had both seen Jack Warner as the secret agent in *I Was a Communist for MI6*, they had been parachuted into America to ferret out atom secrets. Thelma had been briefly impressed into service as the Yankee temptress played by Patricia Roc.

If Bob ever had a son, and caught him playing war, he would belt him black and blue. If, as it seemed sometimes, the Indo-China War dragged on long enough for a son of Bob's to grow up and be conscripted into it, Bob would put the lad on the Paddy Boat himself, and send



him off to Ireland with all the other Beetniki and conchies.

His family had done its bit.

"Again," drawled Powell, who treated actors worse than he treated anyone else, which was quite an achievement. "Try to look more terrified, fellows. The treens are trying to kill you, after all."

In the back of the helicopter, as "I am a Mole and I Live in a Hole" played on a reel-to-reel tape recorder, Bob and Terry clung to the webbing and listened to Darbshire's modest war stories. The lieutenant clearly didn't like recounting his own exploits and played everything down if he had been involved. With Captain Jennings, he had actually been to Hanoi undercover, and blown up two American oil-tankers in Haiphong Harbour. Darbshire was keener on regaling them with anecdotes about his comrades.

Molesworth and his band of merry cut-throats specialized in rescuing downed pilots, carrying out daring acts of sabotage along the Casey Jones Trail or having hairsbreadth escapes. They were supposed to be executing covert reconnaissance missions deep inside enemy territory but spent most of their time on high-profile japes and wheezes. These public schoolboys seemed to be in a different war. Bob couldn't imagine them experiencing the terror, discomfort, misery and doubt that had been his lot ever since Sergeant Grimshaw first called him a tart. In peacetime they'd all be Arctic explorers, mountaineers or in prison.

"Winker" Watson, who had been captured by the enemy five times and on each occasion had escaped in the same way most people would nip out for a packet of tabs, was the door-gunner on this ship. He periodically raked the jungle with fire, claiming to be tiger-hunting.

"Do you know," said Darbshire, "I think Winker's just popped someone."

They looked out of the open door and saw two bodies sprawled in a clearing. Among them were the half-assembled parts of what looked like an American-made rocket-launcher.

"A boundary," said Winker.

The helicopters were playing "pub cricket," scoring runs on the number of legs possessed by their kills. It was considered bad form to take pot shots at innocent goats to get ahead.

Darbshire, trusted to keep the score, made a note. "You're all bloody doolally," Terry said.

Darbshire shrugged, embarrassed.

"If you think we're mad, wait until you meet the chap at the end of our little Sunday jaunt."

They were proceeding north-west into Laos, over mountainous country. The jungle below was thicker, more remote from the War, but primordially dangerous. Bob half-expected a long-necked brontosaurus to poke its head out of the trees, roaring at the flying machines.

Darbshire flipped open a file folder marked "MOST SECRET" and showed them a photograph. It showed a smooth-faced chinless youth with a mop of curly locks in the uniform of the Coldstream Guards, sheathed sword in one hand, bearskin in the other. He stood erect, but had a big, open smile. He looked about 14.

"This is Major Basil Fotherington-Thomas. Major

Molesworth was at school with him."

"Looks harmless," Terry said.

Darbshire wiped his specs.

"Looks can be deceiving, old man. Fotherington-Thomas has more medal ribbons than Lord Emsworth's prize pig. Mountbatten called him 'the finest jungle fighter of his generation', said he was the new Wingate. He's been out here since '63. We haven't had official word from him in 18 months, but intelligence suggests he is running his own show from some stone-age settlement way, way up the Ulu. He's got his own war going, and has been upsetting top brass by popping off some people who are supposed to be our allies. He issues statements, claiming responsibility for assassinations, always branding the dead as traitors or corrupt. He's had a few ARVN Generals killed."

"And were they traitors or corrupt?" Bob asked.

"Well, in all probability, yes. But it still doesn't do just to top them in the street, you know. Due process of law, and all that."

"You've let this go on for a year and a half?" said Terry.

"This isn't the first attempt to, um, re-establish contact with Major Fotherington-Thomas. Have you ever heard of 'Just William'?"

"The tunnel fighter?"

"That's the fellow. Captain William Brown, the solo man. Once sat in one of those enemy tunnels on his own for 20 days awaiting business, then scragged 18 treens, armed with only a Sykes-Fairburn knife and a torch."

Darbshire dug out another photograph.

"Brown was sent in alone to talk sense to Fotherington-Thomas. Hasn't been seen since."

Bob looked at the photograph.

"Yes, he bloody has," he said. "I saw this bloke dragged up as a tart in Saigon. He assassinated an ARVN officer. One shot to the head."

"I'm not surprised. Seems 'Just William' has joined the other team. Frightful bad show, really."

Though he must have been pushing 80, Schmuell Gelbfisch wore a violently orange kaftan over his swollen belly and a leopard-spotted fur hat on his bald head. He was propped up by a 19-year-old "secretary" with the shortest skirt Bob had ever seen and soft leather thigh-boots. He had to be arranged in his seat in the screening room like a sultan being lowered into a bath of pillows.

Born in Warsaw, Gelbfisch was the first film producer to relocate from Berlin and establish his studio in the Ukraine, which became the global centre of the entertainment industry in the teens and was only now surrendering its pre-eminence to international co-productions shot with the cheap labour of Spain and the Philippines. The growling bear of Metropolis-Gelbfisch-Mayer, the company Gelbfisch founded with the Czech writer Carl Mayer in 1919 to make the silent classic *The Blood Lust of Dr Caligari*, was still the most familiar trademark in the world. He had stayed in power longer than any president or monarch.

Martino Scorsese, Gelbfisch's grand vizier, sat immediately to his left and a little below. Michael Powell, a supplicant for once, had dressed up a bit with a beret,

and was seated within swatting distance of the mogul.

Bob was jammed in down at the front with the "talent." Rodney Bewes apologetically introduced himself.

"I'm doing my best to be you, mate. Honest."

Bob thanked him. From what he had seen, Bewes was a fine actor, even if he wouldn't last ten minutes in the Wheeltappers much less Indo-China. He'd still have preferred Albert Finney, who had just made *King and Country*, a film about the man who shot Sergeant Grimshaw, with Leo McKern as John Mortimer, the QC whose argument failed to save Arthur Seaton from the gallows. In *King and Country*, Grim was being played by a much more sinister actor than William Hartnell, the black-browed and scowling Patrick Troughton.

Powell got up and coughed for silence. Bob had expected him to moderate his manner in the Royal Presence, but he drawled as confidently as usual, explaining that they were about to see a fine assembly of the attack on the prison camp. It would be the last scene before the intermission.

The lights went down.

Over black leader, the first ominous thrums of "Teddy Bears' Picnic" played. Dread clutched Bob's heart. The scene faded up on the jungle treeline, shot by Jack Cardiff's second unit in Queensland, as bombs exploded, turning everything into a big bonfire. Helicopter blades sliced on the soundtrack. Bob's hand crept unbidden to the knife at his ankle. His heart pounded in synch with the wokkas.

Then came a shot of the twelve helicopters in flight, music pouring out of them. Scorsese sighed in contentment. The money was on the screen. The shot pulled back, and the wokkas overflew rolling green fields. Intercut were flashes of the second-unit jungle and the elaborate studio set. Powell had explained that he wanted the artificial jungle to look like a Douanier Rousseau, and dozens of art students had been set to work painting each leaf a bright colour.

The helicopters flew over what was very recognizably Canterbury Cathedral. A family of Indo-Chinese peasants trying to repair a stalled ox-cart looked up from the main street of a small Kentish market town as the LURP passed overhead. An explosion filled the screen.

There was a close-up of Dirk Bogarde, elegantly inexpressive. He looked nothing like "Mad Nye" Molesworth, but managed that spark in the eyes.

The green fields of England were intercut, faster and faster, with the jungles. Fires raged in both landscapes, overlapping in the editing.

Bob was covered with a jungle sweat.

He couldn't watch the actual attack scenes and turned to look at the audience. Scorsese was rapt, Powell critical. The secretary covered her eyes. The actors, who knew it was only play, were mostly shattered. Rodney Bewes breathed "good God."

The lights went up.

"So," said Powell to Gelbfisch, "how much did you love it?"

The mogul tilted his head to one side, as if deciding which way up a painting should be hung, and thought about it.

"Micky," he croaked. "One thing I understand not. The War is in Indo-China. Why you let us see you film it in England?"

"This isn't a film about Indo-China, Sam. It's about England."

Gelbfisch thought some more.

*We put down in a clearing, which turned out to be a graveyard. There were giant granite heads, with thick lips and lazy eyes, stuck all around, staring blindly at the helicopters.*

"Welcome to beautiful Laos," said Terry.

"Looks like more bloody jungle to me," I replied.

*The humid, steaming heat was almost unbearable. You could choke just by trying to breathe in a place like this.*

*Molesworth ordered Jennings and some others to stay with the wokkas, then organized the rest to march the short distance to the camp they had overflowed. He led us all in singing 'They're Changing Guards at Buckingham Palace' to keep us in step.*

*As we entered the village, the locals came out from the huts to look at us. They were savages, naked except for grey mud-streaks, though some spear-carrying men had rank insignia tattooed on their arms.*

*The 20th century was a long way away.*

*A crazy little Englishman darted out from somewhere and introduced himself as David Bailey, a news photographer on an assignment for the Observer. He ranted about Fotherington-Thomas, making the Major sound like a cross between Florence Nightingale and Jack the Ripper.*

*Molesworth had Darbshire take a look at the malarial civilian. Bailey begged us for a place on the helicopter home. He seemed concerned that he had missed his deadline by a few years.*

*At last, we stood in the village square. Flies buzzed all around. More dead eyes stared at us. Even some of Molesworth's Marauders were horrified.*

*From the largest hut, he came. A golden youth with ringlets half-way down his back, he had a tattered paperback of A. A. Milne's Now We Are Six in one hand and a flint axe in the other. He looked up at the world, then around at the village, then down at us.*

*"Hullo clouds, hullo sky, hullo pile of severed human heads," said Major Basil Fotherington-Thomas.*

Bob realized that this was what they whispered about as an XPD mission – meaning "expedient demise." A murder raid. But, though Fotherington-Thomas was armed only with a sharp rock and his men seemed mostly to rely on spears, Molesworth didn't unholster his Webley and shoot the blighter. Instead, the Major stuck out his paw and joked, "Dr Livingstone, I presume."

The heat was worse than ever and the stench was indescribably ghastly. Bob and Terry huddled together for safety, instinctively recognizing that they alone in this place were as yet not completely insane. The pile of heads Fotherington-Thomas mentioned was jumbled on a dais in the village square. Bob had a nasty feeling that the Major viewed his visitors as the potential raw material for another such monument.

Something snakelike and black stirred. It had been camouflaged against one of the giant heads. Bob realized it was a white man, face and clothes striped black and dark green. He smiled, showing a red tongue and

white teeth against the primal background. His eyes glittered.

It was "Just William."

No one else had seen him. Bob nudged Terry, but Brown had blended into the scenery again. Bob looked around. How many shadow men, armed with more than spears, were there around the village?

"Hullo, Molesworth," said Fotherington-Thomas gaily. "You're just in time for tea. Did you bring any tuck?"

Outside the Empire Cinema, Leicester Square was thronged. There were rival groups of beetniki peace protesters and Young Conservative patriots, both claiming the film was an insult to their causes and threatening to disrupt the performance. There was also a rumour that some mad royalist who still thought the King had been seduced away from righteousness by his White Yank wife intended to throw glue into Princess Consort Wallis's hair-do, gumming her tiara to her beehive. The word was that the King's sister-in-law, the Dowager Duchess of York, had agreed to turn up tonight on the off chance that the glueman would strike and she could pretend to be sympathetic.

A discreet row of well-dressed but dangerous men were doubtless ready to step in if trouble started. They were under the direction of a calm chap with a bowler hat, an umbrella and a carnation in his frogged lapel, and a startlingly beautiful woman with auburn hair who wore a leather jump-suit. Bob would have fancied his chances with the security lady, but apparently she was married.

For Bob, the worst of it was the pathetic gaggle of men in wheelchairs or on crutches, with shaggily grown-out Army cuts and the remains of combat gear, holding a candle-lit vigil for the Ex-Servicemen's Peace Campaign. He had wanted to give them a donation, but the security chief discreetly hooked him with his umbrella, saving him from the fate of being photographed by the *Daily Mirror* consorting with men who were regarded as no better than conchies. He heard that Terry was one of the underground leaders of the ESPC. That made sense.

*It Ain't Half Hot, Mum* was the Royal Film Performance. It was a controversial choice, but Lord Mountbatten, who liked a good war film, had seen it and advised King Edward he would enjoy the battle scenes. And the Duke of Cornwall (next in line to the throne), who had served in Indo-China and won the respect of a surprising number of cynical soldiers, was on record as saying that this was the first film to give the truth of the conflict. Bob had heard the King would rather see something with an X-certificate featuring Sarah Miles or Glenda Jackson with no clothes on, but that Princess Consort Wallis overruled him. Powell was obviously delighted at the honour, but still professed indifference. When reporters asked him about it, he responded with stories they could never print about the King's nieces.

In his new-fitted tail-coat, Bob felt like a prat, but his Mam and Dad were beaming, truly happy with him for the first time since he went away. They were chatting with Rodney Bewes, clucking over him as if they had adoption papers in their back pocket. Malcolm McDowell, hotly tipped to win a Best Supporting Actor BAFTA for his mad-eyed performance as Fotherington-Thomas,

was being interviewed by McDonald Hobley for BBC TV. Kenneth Halliwell trotted about with Joan Bakewell, loudly crediting himself with the discovery of Bob. Joseph, in a violently white two-piece that left his midriff bare, attracted photographers. He poked his tongue out at Bob. Diana swanned through, cleavage down to her navel and hair like a termite hill, accompanied by the film's production designer, Ken Russell.

Standing on the velvet carpet, alone for a moment, Bob looked over the ropes, at the pressing crowds. Most of them were here to see the Royals and the stars. But some were here to make a point, to be seen, to make trouble. Banners were waving across the square as a group of students, under the direction of the snakelike Howard Kirk, protested against the War. Two weeks ago, riot police had been sent onto the campus at Sussex, and a girl was in a coma after taking a truncheon blow to the head during a "sit-in." Even the most patriotic papers seemed to think there was something wrong with bashing a pretty middle-class girl's brains in just because she was silly enough to have let her boyfriend persuade her to go to an anti-war demo. If she'd been ugly, it would probably have been all right.

Rather embarrassingly, Bob was button-holed by Nootie's widow, who thanked him profusely for what he had said in his book. He didn't think she'd enjoy the film – after much back-and-forth argument, the censors had left in the bullet-hole in Derek Nimmo's head but taken out the blood and brains on the ground – and didn't know what to say to her. Among the showfolk, there were quite a few other VIPs. Dennis Potter, the Labour Party leader, was here, along with Clement Freud, the Liberal chairman, but the Prime Minister would not be coming until later, making his entrance shortly before the Royal Party.

Everyone he met asked him what he thought of the film. Rather than admit he still didn't understand why Micky shot half the jungle scenes in Kent, he claimed not to have seen it yet. After the performance, he'd have to stay out of the way.

Bob looked around the crowd, passing over famous faces, and sensed acutely who was missing. Thelma must be fuming at home. Despite the divorce, he'd asked her to come, but she had seen a photograph of him with Britt Ekland in the Sunday papers and drawn unwarranted conclusions.

He thought for a moment that he saw Terry. But it was only James Bolam in a blue tuxedo, sporting the Fu Manchu moustache he had grown for his next picture.

Fotherington-Thomas sat cross-legged in the square, shaded by his pyramid of severed heads, and read aloud, his clear voice transporting them all to the Thousand Acre Wood where a boy would always be playing with his bear. Bob felt his mind stretching around the craziness of it all. Terry was laughing and crying silently at the same time. Bailey took photographs, though there was no film in his camera. The villagers gathered, lulled by Fotherington-Thomas's voice, and even chimed in with well-loved phrases and sentences.

Every time Bob felt fear crawl down his spine like a many-legged insect, he found that William Brown was looking at him. The tunnel fighter always stood in the

shadows, rarely getting more than a few yards away from the jungle. In this, the worst place in the world, the worst thing was Captain Brown. Worse than Vinh, worse than Grimshaw, worse than the Devil. Because Brown was touched by an angel. His eyes burned with a pure white light of purpose.

With a dozen men like Brown, Fotherington-Thomas could win the War. But then, which war would they find next? These men were not taking orders from Saigon, much less London. This was a whole new country.

"Fotherington-Thomas," Molesworth announced, "as any fool knows, you're utterly wet and a weed."

Tears started in the eyes of the Boy Monster God. He spread his white arms, and bared his chest. Molesworth drove a sharpened cricket wicket through Fotherington-Thomas's heart. Without a sound, he died. His face was almost beatific. He tumbled from his position and sprawled at the Major's feet.

The tribesmen looked at the murderer of their god. Bob didn't know if they'd bow down or rise up.

Brown had disappeared. Bob felt a spasm of panic. Just because he couldn't see Brown didn't mean Brown couldn't see him. In fact, that was when "Just William" was at his most dangerous. And Bob was a left-over witness, unfinished business.

Molesworth picked up *The House at Pooh Corner*, and wiped blood off its cover. The natives, filed teeth bared, hissed at the sacrilege.

"In which Tigger is unbounced," he announced.

As he read, Molesworth was accepted.

There was a tug at Bob's sleeve. He expected a stab at his heart, but it was Darbshire not Brown.

"I've called Captain Jennings on the wireless. He'll bring the helicopters over and get us out. Then we'll flambé this whole place, burn it to the ground."

"Best news I've heard all week," said Terry.

"What about him?" Bob nodded, indicating Molesworth.

"The Major? We've lost him, I fear," sighed Darbshire, shaking his head. "It happens sometimes. He's lived too much, seen too much. He can't take any more."

"Too right, son."

The helicopters were coming. A missile streaked out of the sky, burning white, and exploded.

"I thought the plan was for an air strike *after* we were evacuated," said Terry.

"Do you chaps ever do anything but complain?" snapped Darbshire.

A hut exploded. More fire fell from above. Through the heat-haze, Bob saw one helicopter hovering low. Jennings had fired at the outskirts of the camp to provide a distraction.

People were running all over the place. Molesworth stood still and tall, still reading aloud about Owl and Tigger and Eeyore.

Some of the natives had guns. Watson went down on one knee, with a hideous leg wound that he shrugged off.

A shroud of flame enveloped the pile of heads. They must be preserved in something flammable. Faces shrank to skulls. Eyes boiled to angry points.

A rope ladder unrolled, conking Darbshire, who clutched his head and looked irritated. Terry grabbed and secured the ladder with his weight, nodding

through the din. Darbshire was first up. Bob made it second.

A few other men scrambled up, climbing past Terry and into the cabin. Watson pulled himself up with his hands.

Tribesmen gathered, jabbing with spears, in a circle, closing on Terry. Bill Reynolds got half-way up the ladder, and took a round between the shoulder-blades. He fell backwards, boots clumping Terry, who let go of the ladder and staggered.

The helicopter lifted up.

Bob shouted at Jennings.

"There's still a man on the ground."

The ladder dangled out of Terry's reach.

"Can't stay here forever," Jennings yelled over the noise.

There were explosions all around as the other wokkas poured tracers into the village. Bob, choking on hot fumes, flung himself out of the cabin door, and crawled head-first down the ladder, hooking his boots into the rungs, swaying in the wind, bullets whistling past his head.

He was caught up in the rope and couldn't go any lower. But he could reach out. He stretched his arm, popping his shoulder-joint, and held out a hand for Terry.

Terry was holding his head, bewildered. Tribesmen were within stabbing distance.

"Terry," Bob shouted. "Take my hand!"

*His fingers brushed mine, but suddenly there was a yard of space between us. It might as well have been a million miles. I shall never forget the look of horror on Terry's face. I shall never forgive myself for not doing more.*

His fingers brushed Terry's hair. Then the helicopter rose three feet. Terry looked up and saw the opportunity. He jumped, but missed his grasp. A native swung a spear at him, and he jumped again...

Hanging upside-down, Bob saw a black-and-green face in the native crowd, its eyes fixed malevolently on his. "Just William" would not let him go so easily. Reflexively, he made a fist...

Terry's hand closed around Bob's, and the helicopter lifted upwards. But Terry's fingers slipped on Bob's fist. Their eyes met and Bob saw blame in Terry's surprised glare.

It was too late to open his fist and interlock his fingers with Terry's.

In huge close-up, a hundred feet across, on the screen of the Empire, Leicester Square, James Bolam failed to get a grip on Rodney Bewes's fist. It was the first time Bob had seen the scene cut together.

How had Micky Powell known? In his book, he'd been unable to put it down. He'd taken all the blame, but not given the details.

Only two other people alive could have known.

Bob, soaked with sweat, looked around the darkness. Which of them had it been? Who was here, tonight?

Terry? Or "Just William"?

The helicopter was 20 feet from the ground. Bob was

slung underneath it like an anchor. Terry sprawled among the natives, who looked up at the departing war machine. Bob saw the dark shape of William Brown closing on the writhing Terry.

He screamed and screamed, eyes shut tight, unable to watch the inevitable play out.

"It's this passage," Halliwell had said. "You can't let it stand and expect to be published. It's tantamount to treason."

Bob remembered what he had written.

*Somehow, Terry got out of the camp – I think Brown might have rescued him, and dumped him in the jungle – and wandered around for days in the jungle, delirious and fever-struck. He was recaptured by the treens and wound up in another prison camp, where another officer presented him with the deal Vinh had offered. I have a cutting from the Straits Times, an English-language newspaper from Hong Kong, with a photograph of Terry getting off an airliner in Zurich and the story of the press conference he gave to denounce the War as Anglo-Russian imperialism. Now, he travels around Britain, almost a fugitive in his own country, addressing anti-War meetings, and saying that Britain has no business in Indo-China, that the peoples of the country should be left to work out their destiny for themselves. He also campaigns for the government to do more to secure the release of prisoners of war. In his place, I would have done the same thing in Indo, and be doing the same thing at home.*

Halliwell had made him change the last sentence to "some things can be understood but not forgiven." He always told himself that he meant his own moment of cowardice, but he knew everyone else who read the book thought he meant Terry's "treason."

The film ended with another scene Bob had not seen before. The fires engulfed Fotherington-Thomas's camp and faded into a blood-red banner. There was a pan down to Rodney Bewes, with long hair and fashionable clothes, sitting in a bookshop, signing copies of Bob's book.

Filing past, with books to be autographed, were all the characters from the film. Those who had died were hideously mangled. Intermingled were life-sized teddy bears. At the end of the line, making eye-contact with Rodney Bewes as he neared him, was James Bolam, still in uniform.

On the soundtrack, a ragged chorus of soldiers sang "Teddy Bears' Picnic."

The film ended with Rodney Bewes and James Bolam – no, damn it, Bob and Terry – looking at each other, not saying anything out loud.

Haunted faces.

The applause was still continuing, and Micky Powell was taking bows, smiling broadly at the small but significant section of the audience who were boozing as loud as the others were cheering, as Bob made it to the Gents. He was a wreck. The film had brought everything back. Now here he was in his silk shirts and his MG sports car and his poncey haircut swanning around with shallow pseudos and arty-farty types who didn't care nearly as much as they pretended they did.

Who was he trying to kid?

He knelt over a toilet bowl and puked up the smoked salmon he had eaten at the reception. He had been presented to the King and now he was throwing up like a teenage drinker. He was sick until he was empty.

How could he ever face anyone? Now that everyone knew?

He staggered out of the stall and shoved his head under a running tap.

Cold water stabbed his hackles.

He looked up, rubbing paper towels into his neck. Water had seeped down into the back of his shirt.

He looked into the mirror. Eyes glittered from behind him. He wasn't afraid.

He turned.

A shape came out of one of the stalls. Bob knew it was Brown, somehow come from out the jungle hells of the other side of the world, still intent on settling accounts, silencing the witness.

This was for the best. At least he would die as he was supposed to have died.

It wasn't Brown.

"Hello, our kid. This time, you're the one spewing."

Terry was thinner than he had been. In the photographs Bob had seen, he wore his hair long and beard shaggy, but now he was clean-shaven and had a severe short back and sides.

He wore a navy uniform.

"I'm not enlisted in me own name," he explained.

"Terry, I'm..."

Terry shrugged. "Aye, I know."

They looked at each other, just as the actors had in the film. Bob wondered if Powell were directing them.

"For a while, in the jungle, I thought you'd done it because of Thelma," Terry said.

Bob laughed.

"I know, I know," said Terry. "I went daft. That's a good picture, you know. I don't know what all those English fields and teddy bears were for, but it brings it back. A lot of people are going to have their minds changed. You've done well."

"It's not my picture."

Terry smiled.

"How've you been, kidder?" Bob asked.

"Busy. But I can't take it any more. The speeches, the meetings, the organizing. I can't do that. I'm just a Geordie piss-head in way over my depth. You're the clever one. I'm going to sea because I can't be a hero any more. That's your job, Bobby. Know what I mean?"

Bob did, but shook his head.

"It's bloody funny when you think about it, Bob. Living through it all, from Grimshaw through Khe Sanh to Fotherington-Thomas counted for nothing. Your book made people sit up, but it's only this film that will get through. From now on, the film and our lives are mixed up in a jumble. People will ask you about things in the film they made up, and you'll start to wonder whether they happened. Eventually, the film will seem more real than the life. In the meantime, you know what you have to do."

Bob left his tailcoat in the toilet, and joined the crowd piling out into the square. The mood was strange. He wondered what the King had thought.

A ready young bloke shook his hand and congratulated

lated him. Bob realized that had been Charles, Duke of Cornwall. He fancied the Prime Minister looked at him with hatred. He couldn't get within 20 yards of Powell, who was beaming between Scorsese and a small man Bob took to be Imre Pressburger. He allowed himself to be washed out of the foyer with the surge of people.

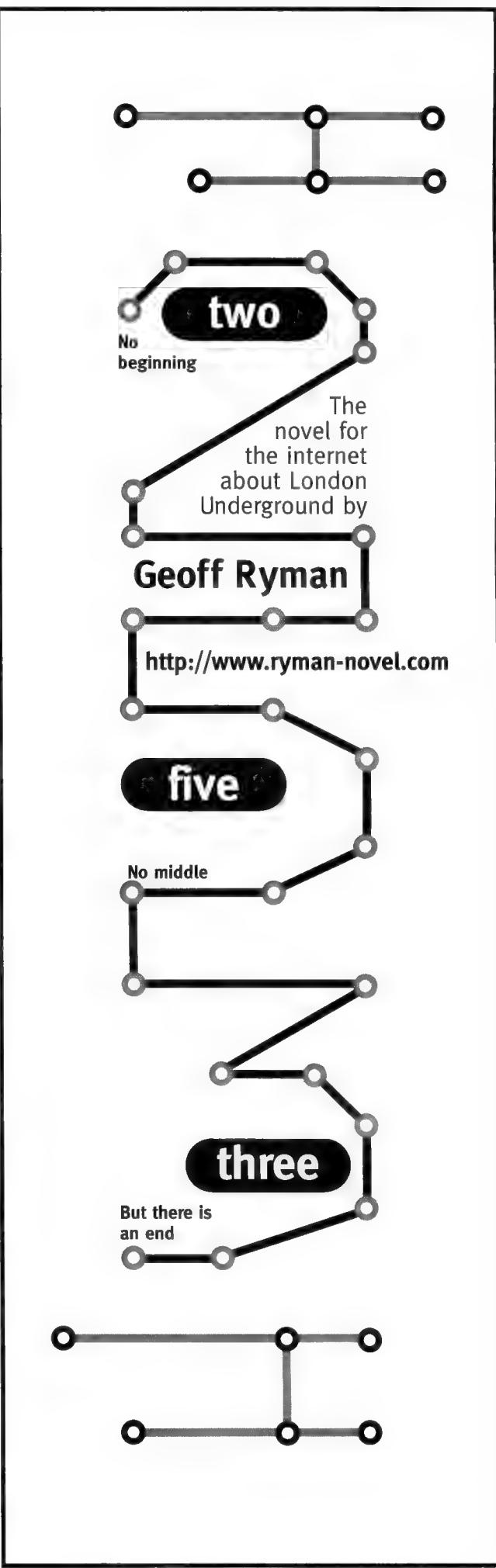
Terry had vanished. Bob was no longer looking around for the mad eyes of William Brown.

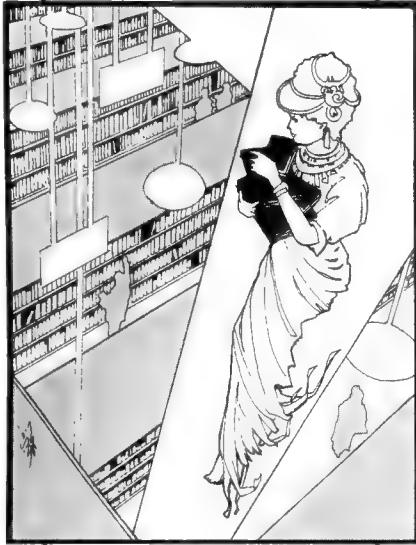
Bob fought his way to the stand of the Ex-Servicemen's Peace Campaign. A couple of Young Conservatives were jeering at the bearded men, some of whom were in wheelchairs.

"Excuse me," he said to a man holding a placard, "but how do I join up with you?"

**Kim Newman and Eugene Byrne** are looking forward to the publication of their book *Back in the USSA*, which collects together all their alternative-timeline stories about communist America and capitalist Russia. With publication of the above two-parter, the entire series has appeared in *Interzone* – except for the final piece, a 19,000-worder entitled "On the Road," which acts as a capstone to the whole saga. To read that last story, you'll have to obtain the book, which is due out soon from Mark V. Zeising (P.O. Box 76, Shingletown, CA 96099, USA).

Below: Kim Newman (left) and Eugene Byrne, 1997-style. Eugene's caption reads: "A right smug-looking pair of smart-arse gits or what?"





REVIEWED

This is going to be an irritable column, as it covers three anthologies that have contrived to irritate me in different ways. To start with the most obvious observation, themed anthologies ought not to have misleading titles, and Ric Alexander's *Cyber Killers* (Orion, £16.99) contains several items that feature neither cybernetics nor homicide. It's a substantial collection of 24 stories loosely grouped under three heads: "Network Terrorists," "Robot Crime" and "Virtual Murder," but none of these is an adequate description. "Network Terrorists," for instance contains Terry Pratchett's "# ifdef DEBUG+'world/ enough' + 'time'" which is a tale of solitary madness having more in common with Bob Shaw's "Light of Other Days" than Poul Anderson's "Sam Hall" (also featured), and the protagonist of Robert Silverberg's "The Pardoners' Tale" is a Stainless Steel Rat type who, far from terrorizing anyone, seeks only to make as few waves as possible while ripping off the system.

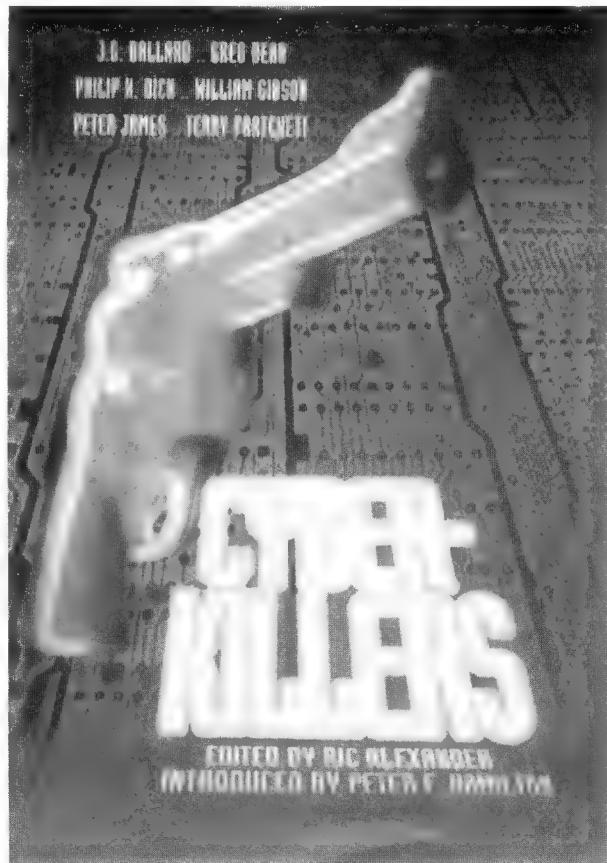
As for Arthur C. Clarke's "Crime on Mars," that contrived little tale of connoisseur burglary features neither violence nor anything more cybernetic than some precision hand-tools. I can think of no justification for including it, nor does Alexander's story-introduction (called "INFO") offer any – but then, they are generally of little value. His only literary criterion appears to be, "Has it been filmed?" and he makes many errors of fact, assuring us, for instance, that *Consider Phlebas*, which takes place while the Hundred Years' War is sputter-

## Misleading Titles and Political Grumps

Chris Gilmore

ing away on Earth, is set "around nine millennia in the future." In such circumstances it's predictable to bitch about omissions; but how could anyone include neither "Mother Hitton's Little Kittons" nor anything from *The Cyberiad* in such a book?

Having got into a thoroughly bad temper with the editor, I mentally renamed the collection "Sundry Misdeeds." As such, how does it rate?



The answer must depend on who you are. The stories vary hugely in age, quality and familiarity, with two of the oldest, "Crime on Mars" and Robert Sheckley's "Watchbird," being slight, idiot-plotted pieces unworthy of revival. Robert Bloch's "Comfort Me, My Robot" and Philip K. Dick's "Impostor" have also worn badly, and despite some excellent writing Roger Zelazny's "Home is the Hangman" is implausibly dependent on coincidence. Against those, "Sam Hall" retains its sombre power, despite a period patina of analogue-computing technology; Alfred Bester's "Fondly Fahrenheit" is a genuinely experimental piece that actually and triumphantly works; and Iain M. Banks's "A Gift from the Culture" is an exceptionally fine study of a hopelessly weak character portrayed from inside. Dean Koontz's "The Undercity" (ascribed to "Robot Crime") is a clever, funny tall tale with plenty of non-violent crime but no robots on stage, while Pat Cadigan's "Angel" and William Gibson's "Johnny Mnemonic" retain their visionary qualities, despite being described as tales of "Virtual Murder."

So who should buy this one? If you're an enthusiast, most of the best will be familiar, but if you happen to know a teenager who's just getting into sf this isn't a bad sampler. Tell him to read Peter F. Hamilton's introduction, but dump Alexander's INFOs – and wait for the paperback; kids are *Hell* on books.

**A** propos which... as a child I rapidly became suspicious of books labelled Monster, Bumper, Jumbo or Mammoth. They were fat, and they did indeed contain stories and strips, but they were bulked out with inane things to do or make, uninteresting mazes and puzzles, and tedious dice-games. I therefore hefted *The Mammoth Book of Dracula* (Robinson, £6.99) with its four-side contents page, and wondered how much was padding. There proved to be quite a lot, and none worse than the first item which is the opening of an appallingly inept "dramatization" of Stoker's novel, produced for one night only to affirm copyright.

The idea behind the book is, "suppose Dracula had survived the attentions of Van Helsing etc., how would his career have proceeded through the 20th century and beyond?" A few people had already provided episodes, and Stephen Jones has commissioned a whole lot more, making 33 in all, of which many are blatant hackwork. Others read as if they ought to have been something else, most

notably Basil Copper's "When Greek Meets Greek," which begins like a perverse love story in the manner of John Fowles, but comes to a premature, messy and unconvincing end as the vampire element is tacked on; and a dreary women's magazine story from Michael Marshall Smith just happens to contain a wholly inconsequential vampire.

Kim Newman has taken the opportunity to revisit the world of *Anno Dracula* in "Coppola's Dracula," with a Dracula film being made in the style of *Apocalypse Now*. The best and longest piece in the book, it's a very good sustained joke, and I wonder how some of the real characters feel about the parts he has assigned them; but Newman spells their names right so wothehell. In fact, the longer pieces tend to be the better, with stylish items of *grand guignol* from Paul J. McAuley and Peter Crowther, an imaginative piece of character-writing from R.

Chetwynd-Hayes, an enjoyable black farce wherein Dracula meets the social workers from Terry Lamsley and another from F. Paul Wilson where good ol' Yankee-Irish ingenuity is too much for the vampire dominators and their stooges, an ingenious vampire-scientification from Brian Stableford and an elegant exercise in complex blasphemy from Brian Hodge. Those are enough to make it good value at the price, and as the contributions of Brian Mooney, John Gordon, Christopher Fowler and Joel Lane aren't far behind, this is a meaty mammoth as they go. The economics of book-production are such that with all the dross trimmed, and without the tacky gilt on the cover, it would probably cost only a pound less, so there may be something to be said for Jones's "come one, come all" editorial approach – but it won't be said by this reviewer.

This is a far better collection than it looks, but that's no compliment – it looks very tatty. A more discriminating, less mammoth approach might have produced something less determinedly down-market – and left time and cash for a proof-reader. Good writing shouldn't be sold by the pound.

The blurb describes Brad Linaweaver and Edward E. Kramer's anthology *Free Space* (Tor, \$23.95) as a compendium of "politically-engaged science fiction adventure"; a description which invites one to ask what purpose such engagement can possibly serve now the Cold War is won, the Wall is down and even Clause Four is out. We whose good fortune it is to live in western Europe or North America are no longer in danger of annihilation or expropriation, and while

there's no lack of controversy, its focus has shifted from the grand to the marginal. Given universal acceptance of the right to free expression, the separation of Church and State and a free market in education, should teaching Creationism as a science be legally defined as fraud? That and similar questions are fun to debate, but to get "politically-engaged" with? Get real!

Nonetheless, the editors and their coterie evidently feel that the issue of personal freedom in a space-going future is sufficiently important to merit a themed anthology, and they've even given it some very broad constraints. In this universe there's FTL travel and a Federation extending across many planets whose inhabitants enjoy, in so far as it's enjoyable, high security at the cost of restricted freedom; Spacers, by contrast, live on their ships or in artificial habitats under conditions of anarchic capitalism; an ill-defined group of "Jeffersonians" mediate between the two as and when necessary. Well enough, so what do the 20 contributors come up with?

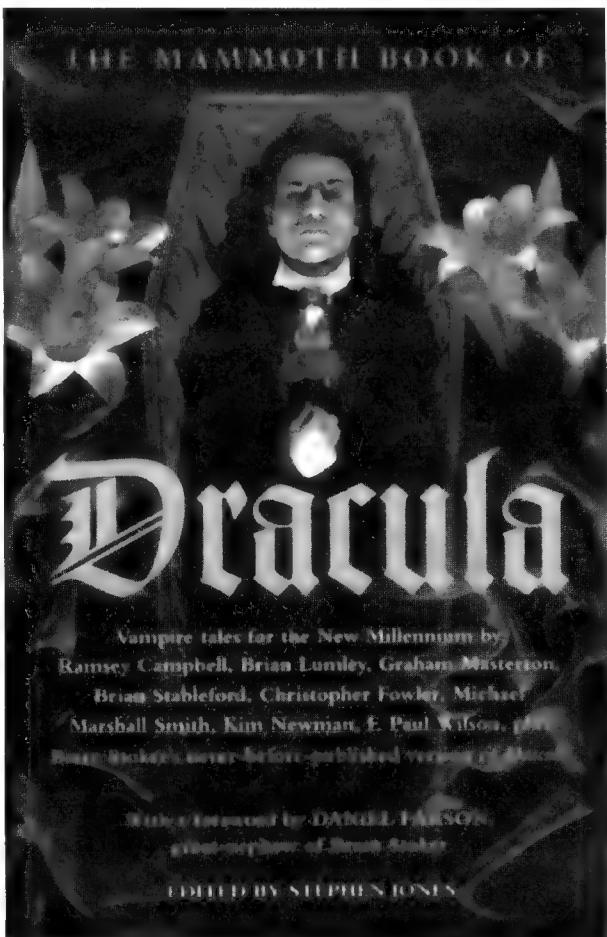
Little enough, in general, and the closer they stick to the brief, the less do they achieve. William F. Wu's "Kwan Tingui" is a delicate tale of Chinese sensibility which might have happened in many another context, Poul Anderson's "Tyranny" is a neat if stylized study in the varieties of human vanity and folly, Arthur Byron Cover's "The Performance of a Lifetime" is an amus-

ing tall story, but after those it's downhill all the way. Robert J. Sawyer's story depends on a *deus ex machina*, as does John DeChancie's; James P. Hogan's "Madame Butterfly" is more elegantly written than either, but depends on an astrophysical coincidence more gross even than theirs; Jared Lobdell's "The Last Holosong of Christopher Lightning" pastiches Cordwainer Smith's style well enough but has no content whatever; Peter Crowther's "The Killing of Davis-Davis" is a mere illustration of the proposition that if time travel made sense nothing else could; L. Neil Smith's "A Matter of Certainty" is a pious little tale straight from the 1950s ASF about two alien races who are fighting an endless and pointless war until some clever Terrans explain to them that trade and cooperation pay better; and William Alan Ritch's "If Pigs Had Wings" idiot-plots an entire society. In that one an adolescent girl is surprised when her parents come home early, so she pretends to be in bed copulating with an older man; of course, he's *really* there to teach her to read, that being forbidden to young people. Why? Don't bother asking.

John Barnes was too dispirited to write a story at all, so his contribution is a fictionalized account of the *accidie* into which the prospect cast him. I sympathize.

Ian Watson has always been a writer of style, and of ideas. He's also been extremely prolific, which I attribute partly to energy, but equally to a certain lack of discrimination, for the ideas range from the ingenious and entertaining ("The Very Slow Time Machine") to the obtusely silly ("Slow Birds"), both being the leading stories in their collections. Perhaps for the same reason, and surprisingly in a writer of his quality, he perpetrates some solecisms: most of us possess a fine-toothed comb, but who can display a fine toothcomb? John Newsinger, reviewing a recent novel in *Foundation*, accused him of presenting cardboard characters and writing without passion, but I would dispute both impeachments. My own diagnosis is that, although his books are often too short to develop some minor characters, his major characters are fully realized and his passions fully engaged, but his sympathies are such as few of bourgeois-liberal-democratic predilections could share. His latest novel, *Oracle* (Gollancz, £16.99), displays his usual virtues and faults.

The silliness appears almost at once, when he drags in by the ears, and attributes to Tom Ryan, his principal character, the undiluted Tam Dalyell line on





the sinking of the *Belgrano* (an incident which has no connection whatever with the plot). Fifteen years after the event it reads very strangely even to me, and for anyone under 30 it must seem like suddenly getting steamed up over the Marconi Scandal or the Jameson Raid – but Tom's mind appears to be a museum of everything that Messrs Kinnock, Smith and Blair renounced, denounced or tiptoed away from in order to be elected, notably an ambiguous attitude to the IRA. There's even (I swear I'm not making this up) a sneer at Margaret Thatcher for being a grocer's daughter. I suspect Watson could tell editors Lineweaver and Kramer rather a lot about political commitment – but to the plot.

Tom just happens to be proficient in classical Latin, and just happens to be on the A5 (Watling Street) when Marcus, a first-century Roman centurion, gets precipitated through a time-warp (caused by someone attempting to cali-

brate a time-viewer) into the present. What is he to do with this apparent nutter and involuntary illegal immigrant who at first regards him as next best thing to a god? He and his sister Mary begin by giving him a crash-course on two millennia of history (which Marcus absorbs with admirable fortitude), then expose him to an historical pageant in Milton Keynes which emotionally overloads him. Marcus makes a noisy but bloodless scene, in the course of which he attracts the attention of Barney, an investigative journalist little encumbered with ethics, and the game's afoot.

It's a jerry-built contrivance, but Watson writes well enough to compensate. He has a fine eye for urban scenery and interiors, a good ear for the rhythms of spoken English, and deftly brings out the quasi-incestuous relationship between Tom and Mary well before Marcus's presence precipitates its inherent instability. As the book proceeds its atmosphere becomes

ever more paranoid, with MI5, MI6, the IRA and the nerdish inventor of the time-viewer all becoming involved, and all interpreting what they know of the situation in terms of their variously extreme prejudices.

After a somewhat shaky start, and making lavish use of coincidence, Watson unifies these disparate plot elements into an enjoyable if slightly preposterous thriller. The novel ends with a prolonged and satisfying climax which ought to film extremely well, though (as Watson himself acknowledges) it leaves a forest of loose ends. Whether he intends to produce a sequel or was just in a hurry is unclear, and as with all tales of time-travel, the "scientific" basis requires some fairly brutal suspension of disbelief, but that's no great strain once you've swallowed Tom's political reflections – which constitute, indeed, the only serious blemish on a thoroughly enjoyable entertainment.

Chris Gilmore

Four books to review and four sets of different demons to contend with. A science-fiction novel and a science fiction (sort of) anthology, and a horror novel and a horror (sort of) anthology. So far, so neat; but here the symmetries end.

The sf first. The novel is Paul Preuss's *Secret Passages* (Tor, £23.95). A mysterious physicist on the island of Crete invites to a physicists' convention called Delos II a maverick physics hippie-figure named Peter Slater. This Slater is not regarded in all circles particularly highly because of his touchy-feely approach to hard science: but it is an approach that Manolis Minakis seems to appreciate. As the Greek man puts it, "He is willing to admit that the world is real after all, even at the quantum level." So far so good. Slater's wife, Anne-Marie, has a very good reason to accompany her new (second) husband to the island: she has struck a bargain with her suspicious wheeler-dealer brother to spy on Minakis and get to see the treasure that Minakis is rumoured (in the trade) to have discovered. Anne-Marie is content to be a spy because she speaks fluent Greek and because her brother, Alain, with his connections, has agreed to help her win full custody of the children she had with her first husband.

These at least are the laid plans. Needless to say, there are complications. What Anne-Marie does not anticipate is the charm of Minakis and the way that she will be entranced by the story of his life. This section is by far the best in *Secret Passages*, reading as a sort of Greek version of the flashback scenes in *The Godfather II* – referring as it does to the Mother Country and to

## A Devil for Every Street

David Mathew

humble origins. Minakis's mother was a 14-year-old girl who gave birth in the middle of a thunderstorm in a shack at the top of a hill, having left voluntarily the village in which she had lived for fear of ostracism about her under-aged pregnancy. The boy is brought up by his grandmother, who, coincidentally, is able to cast the Evil Eye, and does so against anyone foolish enough to insult her beloved charge. From these seeds a great man somehow grows. Years later, of course, Minakis discovers that Anne-Marie's interest in his life is part of her plan to get back her children. Surprisingly, Minakis agrees to let her see what she'd imagined she'd have to be extremely sneaky to see.

The plot is fast, unusual, and the characterization is adroit. Personally, I struggled with some of the passages of hard and harder science, but to

Preuss's credit I was not tempted to skip over them, so embedded in (for me) more absorbing passages were they. Peter Slater, for example, is introduced at the conference as the man "whose distinguished career includes the prediction of the mass of the Z-zero from first principles, and who predicted the mass of the inside quark and the existence of the I particle, and who was one of the participants at our original Delos conference..." If that is not enough to make you gulp, you will love *Secret Passages*; if you find this tricky, I recommend it anyway. There's a great deal of warmth and energy to it. The nature (and identity) of the bad guy in *Secret Passages* changes several times, and you will need your wits about you with this book.

Elaire Palmer's *Random Factor* (Pulp Fiction, £7.50) is an anthology of very short sf stories (19 of them in 120 pages), with the emphasis on the weird and wonderful, and where anything smacking of conventionality is booed. It is a strange and brave collection. The title alone hints at the lack of criteria used for the fiction that was chosen. (It might as well have been called *Anything*.) This is a book (ambitiously enough) about Life: self-reflective, self-referential. Short and sweet. To look at, it is not so much post-punk as it is simply punk: a multi-fonted, crashing manuscript of higgledy-piggledy styles and angles. From one story to the next there is very little in common. It is very much experimental – and as we all know, many experiments do not work. Not all of the stories in *Random Factor* were to this reviewer's particular taste, but there were plenty that were.

The lead writer is Jeff Noon, and his story is "Blurbs." Having read *Vurt* (1993) and *Pollen* (1995), I found the story something of a disappointment. This is a tale about the professional acquisition of new information; the Blurbs of the title are a means of acquiring late-20th-century information. Strictly in terms of ambition, this has plenty to recommend it: "Blurbs" anthropomorphizes the very notion of Story. But for me it didn't work. Vicky Grut's "Welcome to the Working World" was more of a step in the right direction, simply by dint of the fact that it doesn't work so hard. This is a story from the point of view of a rock band's PR man, and has a neat line in Chandlersque bathos: "I knew what he meant. I can speak Veiled Threat as well as the next person," is but one example of this. "Marc Bolan Stole Your Giro" by Simon Lewis is a story through which the spirit of Philip Larkin (or more modernly, Glyn Maxwell) curiously shines in the tetchy, grumpy, wickedly playful prose. This is only just sf: a fantasy of film images, and to my knowledge, the only story ever to feature fantasies about Lego men and include a name-check for Brain Cant, late of BBC's *Play School* and *Play Away*, among others.

Remembering the brouhaha following *Interzone*'s publication of Ian Watson's "Jingling Geordie's Hole" and Brian Aldiss' "Horse Meat," I can say with some confidence that Richard Guest's "Americancola 2" will have some of *IZ*'s readers hooting with glee and others reaching (figuratively or otherwise) for the sick-bucket. For me, this was the best story in the book. It begins with the line: "If I can just get my wife to have sex with next-door's dog, everything will be alright," and it is not intended to be an ironic statement: it expresses a genuine wish. But he cannot bring himself to ask her: there is not even the potential for success. This desideratum is not for sexual gratification: it is to earn some money via pornographic celluloid. The story is a damning reflection on modern times; an ugly extrapolation of existing trends. A ten-year-old girl has boyfriends over, and sex with her father's consent, for example. All of the stories in *Random Factor* are illustrated differently, and this story is decorated with badly-framed Polaroids of a leaping hound, juxtaposed with barely distinguishable blurred stills from porn. All of which makes for a very disquieting read, and full marks to the author for this much if nothing else.

Steve Harris's *The Devil on May Street* (Gollancz, £16.99) has as its initial concept something not particularly inspiring. In truth, however, this seems to be Harris's way. He takes ideas that have been used

before but injects them with new life and vigour by the sheer force of prose. The train to Hell was the concept for his first novel, *Adventure-Land*, and *The Devil on May Street* refers to a host of earlier works. The title might make the reader think of something like the *Nightmare on Elm Street* cycle, or possibly Ramsey Campbell's *The House on Nazareth Hill* (1996), or any work in which the Devil proves himself to be present on the next street along. Harris's novel dashes along, tossing out splendid scenes such as the weird writer father character sneaking into somebody's house for the sole purpose of stealing a bowlful of porridge; or the boy on the swing, disappearing by a degree with every oscillation. This is gutsy writing; you might have been in terrain very similar before, but this should not take away from what you learn.

The horror anthology is *Millennium* edited by Douglas Winter (HarperCollins, £16.99). It is almost diametrically opposed to *Random Factor*. While Palmer's anthology was raw and unordered, *Millennium* is sleek – though both of them explore an alternative parallel existence to our own...

Following Winter's success with the award-winning *Prime Evil* the proposition naturally arose to edit a sequel volume. Winter declined. Instead he began the long, laborious process of getting a very different publishing proposal underway: what he wanted was to represent the century through which we have all but lived in terms of one writer (or partnership of writers) per decade. There were to be no rules *per se* – beyond those set by the restrictions of good writing. And this was to be a showcase of talent let loose, with the whole century and millennium topped and tailed by Clive Barker (whose name appears in type as large as Winter's own on the cover, much larger than that of his co-contributors); Barker's task was to write (in essence two long stories that were without chronological parameters, so that they would fit wherever they were placed).

Predictably, there is the good, the bad, and the ugly. Barker's stories need two readings before they become noticed for the minor masterpieces that they are: but bear in mind, he has moved many miles since *The Books of Blood*, and "Chiliad: A Meditation" (parts one and two) should not be regarded in the same light as those earlier Splatterpunk tales. Other writers have not moved so far. Richard C. (no longer Christian, note) Matheson provides "Whatever" – a tale in the style of Kim Newman or Howard Waldrop – in which the title is the name of a rock band: "the American Beatles." As is normal with Matheson Jr, the

execution will either warm the cockles of your heart or annoy the hell out of you. Personally, despite the elegance of the prose, it did the latter for me, its amalgam of song lyrics, interview gobbets, posey philosophy, album reviews, and Matheson's own choppy, firefly prose bound to stroke one's fur one way or the other. Splatterpunks David Schow and Craig Spector collaborate on a tale of latter-day Nazism which is cold and beautifully written. But the anthology's high point is Ramsey Campbell's "The Word" – a story of a small-press editor who becomes a Christ figure (in his own mind at least) and tries to impart his opinions to the world around. Nobody can depict mental illness or mental confusion as can Ramsey Campbell, while simultaneously being funny, and *Millennium* is worth delving into for his tale alone, although there is plenty else to recommend it, not least Charles Grant's "Riding the Black," which makes a neat counterpoint to the Campbell story.

*Millennium* is suffering from PMT: Pre-Millennial Tension – but the other books are celebrations rather than warnings. As the 1990s draw to a close, there has to be a form of fiction to reflect where we are in history. The books that I have mentioned above do this, to varying degrees of success.

David Mathew



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You would be forgiven for thinking nobody could breathe fresh and innovative life into the tired and cliché-ridden cadaver that the "serially-deranged killer novel" (as opposed to merely the "serial-killer novel") has become... but you would be wrong, as two marvellous recent books eloquently demonstrate.

Just as Wes Craven unleashes a supposed new take on this particular hoary literary animal – a take which, despite the critical acclaim, amounts to little more than standard "stalk 'n' slash" hokum coupled with an admittedly neat twist on the old Hitchcock classic, *Rope* – we're treated to Barry Hoffman's ***Hungry Eyes*** (Gauntlet, \$35).

Hoffman, the driving force behind the US anti-censorship magazine, *Gauntlet*, has learned from the lessons of the past – most notably Thomas Harris's *The Silence of the Lambs*, Brett Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* and the amazingly underrated Lawrence Block sleeper, *Random Walk* – and taken us that one uneasy and often perilous step into the mind of the mentally disturbed. And, like the true master he is, he's made that mind worryingly understandable.

*Hungry Eyes* begins with the accidental police killing of a man sitting in his apartment. He has been mistaken for a drugs pusher. The police are understandably a little red-faced at their mistake but they manage to gloss over it. By far the most worrying turn of events is that the man's stepdaughter, Renee Barrows, witnessed the whole thing. This is the first traumatic event in eight-year-old Renee's already troubled life. Two years later, the girl gets kidnapped and is held naked in a cage while her captor watches and photographs her. Then she's released. Her kidnapper is apprehended, tried and convicted... although, right up to his death in prison some three years later, he stoically refuses to speak of the crime.

At this time, the media circus surrounding young Renee is something to behold, with reporters from every type of journal and newspaper trying to get in to see the hospitalized girl for an exclusive interview. But only one makes it through the tight security – Deirdre Caffey, hell-bent on telling the tale exactly the way it happened. Deirdre gets her story and the circus moves on in search of fresher game and new horrors. But the ordeal has taken its toll and, seemingly unable to take up a place in society, Renee jumps from a bridge into the murky depths of the Schuylkill River. Her body is never found.

Time goes by...

Deirdre is now an adviser to the Mayor, and has been drafted onto a team of the city's elite crime-busters charged with bringing to justice a serial killer nicknamed the Vigilante.

# Here's Looking at You!

Pete Crowther

She joins the fray following the fifth murder when, understandably, this makeshift band of *Millennium*-style untouchables is getting severe grief from the Mayor and the media at their inability to make any progress. It's then that something scrawled on the mirror at the home of the latest victim strikes a chord with Deirdre... because it's something that, word for word, the young Renee Barrows said to her a decade earlier.

When Deirdre goes before the media, she is fighting the conviction that Renee is still alive and somehow responsible for the killings, staring into the camera lens as though trying to see if she can spot Renee... knowing deep down that she's out there somewhere. It shows in her eyes... and eyes are something that Renee Barrows knew a lot about. The fact is, she still does.

Renee is now 23 and has a new name – Shara Farris. She also has a new pastime: killing perverts whom the legal system seems powerless to punish and then having representations of her victims' eyes tattooed onto her breasts. But this is no simple *Death Wish* rip-off for Shara wants to talk to someone about what she's doing before she completes her task... and there's just one space left on her anatomy and one person whose eyes she wants to add to her collection.

Seeing Deirdre on the television Renee decides to use her in a bizarre way... partly to tell her real story when her "mission" has been completed and partly to play a cat-and-mouse game with her to see if Deirdre can get her apprehended in time to prevent the final slaying. In order to do this, Renee provides clues to Deirdre... clues to something concerning her kidnapping all those years ago that will explain not only what she's doing and but also whom the final victim is. All Deirdre has to do is work it out... but the clock is ticking.

*Hungry Eyes* is a wonderful book. It spares the reader the gory details of the by-now trite "executions" that

so many killers (and books about killers!) have paraded before us by having the "action" – for the most part – take place off-camera. This enables Hoffman to concentrate on characterization and detection, weaving his tale on the one hand like a police-procedural and on the other like a straight suspense thriller.

The answers are complex, the ending ambiguous. The characters are by turn likeable and unlikeable... but, like Bradley Denton's excellent *Blackburn* from a few years back, the reader often finds his or her sympathies lying in the wrong corner of the ring.

Occasionally – though, sadly, all too infrequently – a novel comes along in the horror-cum-dark suspense field that quite literally leaves the reader aghast. What sets these works apart from so many others is their sheer literary expertise. Within the comfortable heartland of the genre we've long had – and long *cherished* – Ramsey Campbell's quietly unsettling novels, each one setting constantly higher levels of language, tone and characterization. But there are many others out there if one only knows where to look.

The most notable of these often unheralded gems is probably Nicholas Royle's *Counterparts*, but the roster should also include the aforementioned Lawrence Block's *Random Walk*, Simon Maginn's *Virgins and Martyrs*, Stephen Gregory's *The Blood of Angels* and so on. It could be that some of these authors did not see their work as being part of the field when they set out, but I'm not going to get into categorization here; I'm just telling it the way I see it.

It could be that, when he set out to write his first novel, *The Dumb House* (Jonathan Cape, £9.99), John Burnside – the author of six collections of poetry (he was selected as one of the 20 New Generation poets in 1994) and the recipient of several awards including the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize – did not intend to produce a horror novel. But he has done just that... and *The Dumb House* may well (and *should!*) turn out to be one of the most memorable high-spots of decade.

The story revolves around the first-person memoir of a young man from a singularly haunted background which included silent fishing sojourns with his father and school holidays spent roaming the countryside with his mother looking for animal corpses: "She said every animal had a place of its own where it would go to die if it could... Mother had a gift for knowing where to look."

Not surprisingly, these unusual formative experiences make for an unusual young man... and one for whom there is a single all-encompassing goal in life: to discern the

exact whereabouts and nature of the human soul.

As a child – when not collecting the remains of animals and storing them for later consideration each neatly labelled in old shoeboxes – the narrator was told stories by a mother who otherwise maintained a cool distance from her son. One of these stories concerns the Persian myth of Akbar the Great who once built a palace – the Gang Mahal, or “Dumb House” – which he filled with new-born children, attended only by mutes, in order to learn whether language is innate or acquired. This story, which he was told repeatedly and which became a firm favourite, provided a link for him between the corporeality of his collection of bones, fur and skin fragments and the single individual essence of each living thing.

As he grows older, and his father dies, the narrator is left only with his mother. Eventually, she too becomes ill and at her death he performs a bizarre ritual which embarks him on the course he will follow for the rest of his life ... and a strange course it surely is, as the novel's opening two sentences suggest:

“No one could say it was my choice to kill the twins, any more than it was my decision to bring them into the world. Each of these events was an inevitability, one thread in the fabric of what might be called destiny, for want of a better word – a thread that neither I nor anyone else could have removed without corrupting the whole design.”

His first action is to advertise, in his local paper, the fact that he is embarking on a study of mutes ... which, of course, is only partly true. Soon after he receives a letter from a Mrs Olerud inviting him to come and see her son. The child is almost entirely wild, sitting alone in the garden eating soil and anything else he finds ... but it is perhaps the woman herself who is the strangest of the pair. After a first visit during which she is awkward and distant – despite the fact that it was she who invited the narrator to the house – she asks him to come again but at a different time. This he does.

He visits on an afternoon and finds the doors open and the child nowhere to be seen. Mrs Olerud herself is lying on the sofa dressed only in a flimsy dressing gown, the hem of which is pulled back invitingly. After several unsuccessful attempts to gain the woman's attention, the narrator opens the dressing gown fully and touches her. When he leaves the house, he is sure that, despite her prone and non-communicative condition, the woman knew exactly what he was doing.

These afternoon get-togethers continue, and become even more intimate, though the woman never acknowledges his presence – no matter what

he does to her – and each session is followed by an evening visit during which the woman acts as though nothing has ever happened. Eventually, due to unforeseen circumstances, the visits are temporarily suspended.

In the local library, the narrator encounters a young mute woman whom seems also to be oblivious to the world about her and he takes her to his house. And then, an unexpected event heralds the prospect of great progress in his “experiment” ... an opportunity to re-create the Dumb House using his own children. But, when they develop their own strange musical language, excluding their father from their “conversations” ...

There are not enough superlatives to do justice to this remarkable, dense, disturbing and almost totally amoral book. It is a fascinating look into the nature and the laws of human cruelty and madness. A landmark novel.

Just space to mention Paul J. McAuley's excellent collection, *The Invisible Country* (Gollancz, £16.99), released late last year and surely due for a paperback edition soon.

One thing many writers fail to recognize is the reader's genuine interest in the genesis of a story ... of all the tiny and seemingly inconsequential events that led to the tale being written or to the tale being written in a particular way. Harlan Ellison and Stephen King are past masters of the craft; Ed Gorman, too. Colin Greenland prefacing all of the stories in *The Plenty Principle* (which I reviewed a couple of issues back) in a fireside-chat tone of voice and Paul McAuley end-plates the tales in this, his second collection, in much the same way, explaining how they came about and, in some cases, what became of them

after publication: one of them, “Gene Wars,” by turn heroic and horrific, went on – after appearing in no less august a periodical as the one you now hold and in *New Internationalist* (in McAuley's words, “a campaigning socialist magazine that devotes each issue to an in-depth examination of a single topic”) – to *Year's Best SF 9* (among other anthologies) and to be used as a teaching aid in at least two university courses (one biology and the other law).

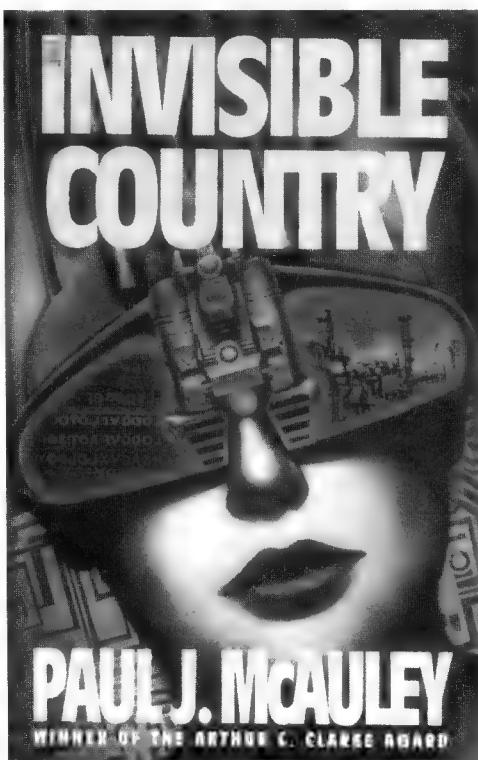
It isn't surprising.

McAuley's tales of, for the most part, dystopian futures (and occasional fractured, barely recognizable pasts) and “their” dysfunctional inhabitants – particularly the blue-skinned “dolls” of the epic *Fairyland* plus some of the stories collected here, including the exceptional novella, “Slaves” – call to mind and then comfortably exceed the excessively alien-Earthian landscapes of Dick, the sheer invention of Gibson, Sterling and John Varley, and the mesmerizing factual back-up and logic extrapolations of Clarke, Bear, Niven, Benford, Asimov *et al* ... plus they display a story-telling ability which is all McAuley's own, making the unbelievable seem all too frighteningly possible and, perhaps, even inevitable.

Here are: smugglers who carry narcotic viruses in false varicose veins rubbing shoulders with radically-modified prostitutes, some with extra sets of arms moulded to their rib-cage (“The Invisible Country”); convicts tagged with “penal chips” which induce epileptic fits if the wearer has alcohol or drugs, breaks curfew restrictions or strays outside permitted city boundaries (“Dr Luther's Assistant”); a world in which “going green” involves “somatic” mutation which grows a metre-high black cowl to absorb sufficient light energy (“Gene Wars”); a scientist who, in the great quest for progress, grafts a human hand onto a pig's back... and that's only for starters (“The Temptation of Dr Stein”); and, of course, the blue-skinned “dolls,” bred/manufactured for combat and servitude... not to mention the provision of pleasure in the cities' sex arcades.

Like a bizarre Mark Twain clone, his tale-spinning talents genetically altered for the amusement and edification of 30th-century literati, McAuley writes aggressively and with power and conviction, word-painting landscapes, events and characters which are by turn beautiful, fascinating or endearing ... and then terrifying. Individually, these stories – like McAuley's novels – are superb achievements; collectively, particularly taken two or three at a time, they demonstrate a formidable talent and a boundless imagination. Quite superb.

Pete Crowther





H. G. Wells's career has had its fair share of excitement during the 1990s. After a hairsbreadth escape from falling into the public domain – which kept OUP's definitive critical editions of the scientific romances off the British bookshop shelves – H. G. landed a cameo role in *Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*, lending such invaluable assistance to the New Man of Steel that he was permitted a subsequent reprise. He was then chosen as the subject of the first issue of *Science Fiction Classics*, which was test-marketed in the Westward TV area in a package which included a copy of *The War of the Worlds* and a cassette tape of Orson Welles's infamous Hallowe'en 1938 dramatization of the book, but when the projected nationwide sales were only 110,000 the publishers (who had been looking for 150,000) pulled the plug on the project.

Fortunately, avid Wellsians unlucky enough not to live in Plymouth or Exeter still have a chance to pick up the Mercury Theater on the Air production by courtesy of *avant garde* band Loretta's Doll, who have released a CD version of *The War of the Worlds* (World Serpent, Unit 17, Seager Buildings, Brookmill Rd, London SE8 4HI) which superimposes their additional sound-effects on a tape of Welles's broadcast. By comparison with the Jeff Wayne musical version of the story the efforts of Loretta's Doll seems distinctly minimalist, and the influence of the soundtrack of George Pal's movie version is rather marked, but Orson Welles's script is as good as ever and the weird musical effects do serve to amplify its dramatic tension.

By virtue of such reproductions as Loretta's Doll's *The War of the Worlds* now qualifies as one of the most intensively-recapitulated texts of the last hundred years, perhaps only outstripped by *Dracula*, which appeared in book form only a few weeks before *The War of the Worlds* began serialization. *Dracula*'s lead is probably unsailable, given the difficulty of imagining a ballet version of *The War of the Worlds*, but it is a fact that the 20th century's two key images of menace – both, of course, extensively redeemed during the latter part of their chequered history by countercultural subversion – are both celebrating their centenary just about now. Wells is not normally considered a *fin de siècle* writer (although he did publish in the *Yellow Book*) but the grandiose iconoclasm of his work was sufficiently in tune with his times to make it readily adaptable to a new Millennial decade, where *The War of the Worlds* can sit comfortably along-

and kaleidoscopic vividness into a disaster story with a difference. The California meltdown which sets the plot in motion does not precipitate a literal return to savagery but it does set its victims adrift in time.

The timeslip in question maroons the hero on the desert island to end all desert islands: the ill-fated encampment of the Donner Party, whose unsuccessful attempt to reach California in the mid-19th century ended in the snowbound Sierra Nevada, where they survived for two months longer than anyone could reasonably have expected (but not long enough) by eating one another. The time-displaced hero is, of course, the only member of the Donner party with a way out – but it leads right back to a future world whose entire population, afflicted by the eponymous time famine, has descended to institutionalized cannibalism, not all of it metaphorical. Here, history and television both consist of endless reruns punctuated by occasional hollow reassurances, and the repetition of the past's errors has now run beyond tragedy and farce to a kind of black melodrama of which we shall doubtless see more. Lance Olsen probably still qualifies as an *avant garde* writer in much the same way that Loretta's Doll qualify as an *avant garde* band, but he really does have the measure of the bitter smack of the *zeitgeist* – and the object which he is tonguing in the photograph on the back page of *Time Famine* is a skull.

When the Mercury Theater's descriptions of alien war-machines tramping across the blackened ruins of New Jersey towards New York caused a ripple of anxiety – which the news media of the day immediately inflated into a full-blown panic – Orson Welles was required to step out of character at the end of the play to reassure his listeners that it was only a Hallowe'en prank, both trick and treat. If you listen carefully to this message, however – which comes across loud and clear on the Loretta's Doll CD – you can tell that he doesn't mean a word of it. We now know that the anxious ripple was a rational response, and that it was indeed the foetal kick of full-blown panic. The Martians never arrived – but they were, in the end, unnecessary. We can build our own irresistible war-machines, and bring utter ruin to our own cities. We don't even need any Martian red weed to blight our crops and spoil our soil. Come the day that time famine really does set in (not tomorrow, maybe, but certainly not a hundred or a thousand years hence) the bugs will not be our rescuers but our heirs.

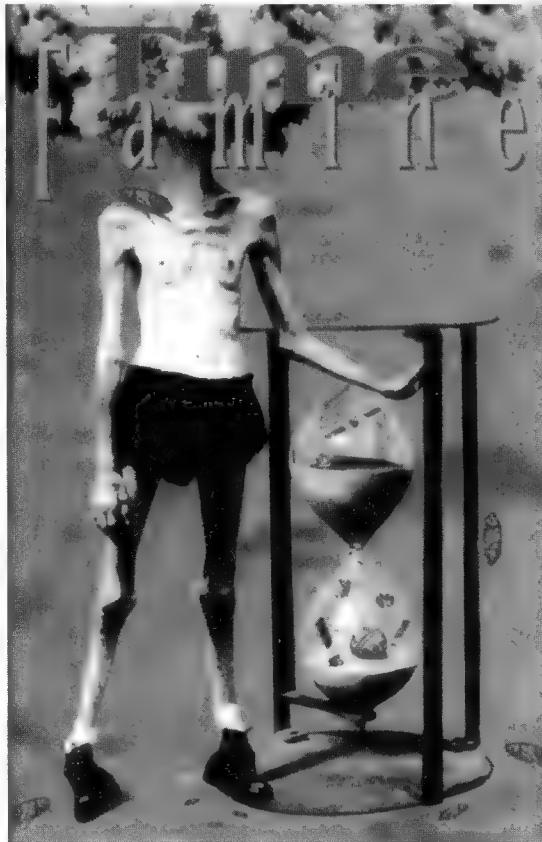
Brian Stableford

## Time Untied

Brian Stableford

side such thoroughly modern products of apocalyptic sensibility as Lance Olsen's *Time Famine* (Permeable Press, \$12.95).

Given the range and versatility of modern media it is inevitable that the late 1990s will produce a deluge of works celebrating the notion that we are reaching the end of a great cycle in human affairs – one which will not merely set the seal on the advancement of a hundred years but the advancement of a thousand. The idea that we are running out of time, not merely as a collection of nation-states but as a world civilization, is bound to make its force felt. Olsen, author of the flamboyant *Tonguing the Zeitgeist*, has carried forward the earlier novel's linguistic adventurism





REVIEWED

Larry Niven's career divides neatly into two distinct phases: first there were those early stories, most of the Known Space sequence up to and including the epic *Ringworld*, that blazed his sf reputation – the really good stuff. Then came those collaborations with Jerry Pournelle along with solo works that performed spectacularly on the sales front but left one wondering what had happened to the early dazzling Niven. The bold bright sf ideas were still there, but the idea-driven plots didn't seem to ignite the way they once had and his protagonists, blandly generic members of some future community, were considerably less engaging than baroque characters like Louis Wu or Beowulf Shaeffer.

His latest book, *Destiny's Road* (Tor, \$24.95), is very firmly late-phase Niven, and there's a link to his two Heorot collaborations (with Pournelle and Barnes): the human colony world, Destiny, which gives its name to the book, exists in the same future as the Camelot of those books, where humans came up against terrifying native life-forms. The perils of Destiny, by contrast, are not quite so sharp-fanged.

We start with an isolated community – Spiral Town. Two hundred years earlier a slower-than-light starship arrived from Earth, found a habitable if distinctly alien world and proceeded to settle it. Then things went badly wrong, and the Spiral Town descendants of the survivors have a mostly low-tech society, along with some remnant high-tech. Their knowledge of their own history is patchy; above all, there's the mystery of the Road, formed by the lander *Cavorite*'s drive as it hovered a metre in the air, first fusing out the spiral of Spiral Town itself before moving off across the planet, scattering earth seeds and growing plants as it went. It was supposed to return but never did and now, 200 years later, merchant caravans regularly arrive in Spiral Town from further down the Road, bringing with them the speckles that are a vital part of the human food supply – be without them long enough and you face permanent imbecility.

A young Spiral Towner called Jeremy Blooher accidentally kills one of the caravaneers and flees down the unknown extent of the Road. On his journey he encounters other human enclaves and learns more about the nature of this alien planet and the history of humans on it. Eventually, he reaches the end of the Road and discovers both the fate of the crew of the *Cavorite* and the secret of speckles.

Laid out like that, it probably sounds a reasonable enough read, but is it? Well, there are two answers to that question, and thanks to *Interzone*'s fax-link to the past you can

## On the Road

Neil Jones

have both. Halfway through the back, in strict contravention of the *Interzone* reviewer's code, I finally gave up on it. An sf reader gets used to working hard, at least initially, to get into situations and backgrounds that are new and strange – that's part of the game – but here the opening situation seemed particularly lacklustre and confusing, clogged with far too many characters, most of them superfluous, all thinly delineated, sometimes amounting to no more than names on the page. As the book progressed, the clues didn't seem to be building up a coherent sense of the world and the episodic plot, as it drifted on, was less than exciting. I did want to find out the secret of the Road and unlock the secrets of this alien planet, but I was by no means confident that Niven was going to deliver it by the end – dark thoughts of an interminable trilogy kept filling my mind.

While the story itself failed to excite, one feature of the book proved positively annoying. Presumably someone, perhaps even Niven himself, realized that keeping track of this story was going to be hard work. After all, in the opening chapter we have the family group of Junior, Jemmy, Brenda, Thonny, Greegry, Ronny, Jane and Mom & Dad Blooher, and that's not to mention a string of other Spiral Towners. (Jemmy's the one we need to focus on, by the way, and most of the early cast-cluster disappear without trace.) So, to placate potential deserters like me, Niven has provided a list of Dramatis Personae. What a good idea! It's a pity though that, while some characters so minor they might best be described as name-tags are included, a lot of others are left off. Worse, some key players are left off – for example Curdis Hann, who's engaged to Junior (later known as Margery) and plays a major role in Jemmy's escape, and Loria Bednacourt, who Jemmy marries! When characters are included seemingly on a whim, a list of names becomes not only useless but downright frustrat-

ing. It also begs the questions: didn't anybody, either Niven or the editor – notice the inadequacies of the list or the opaque, slow-motion opening? And, if so, didn't they care? So my final verdict is – dull, needlessly confusing, uninvolved, and unless you're a Niven completist, give it a miss.

Actually of course, driven by the *Interzone* reviewer's code (a reviewer's gotta read what a reviewer's gonna review) I persevered and finished the book. And lo, just past the halfway point, a mildly magical transformation – not quite of frogs to princes magnitude – came about. I became involved enough in the story to want to see how things came out: partly it was that the balance between mystification and revelation finally seemed to be coming out about right, but mainly that I'd collected enough cues to form a reasonable mental image of the world and what was going on plus start to feel some concern over the fate of the main character, Jeremy Blooher, who starts out paper-thin and stays that way a long time but does finish the book a character of reasonable depth.

And so my final final verdict is that, after a needlessly slow and confusing opening it eventually proves a satisfying read with an effective and affecting conclusion. What really won me over though was the hard sf secrets of speckles, the Road, and a well-thought-out alien world. No, it's not the kaleidoscopic hard sf that made me such an ardent first-phase Niven fan many years ago, but since it's all that's on offer, it'll have to do.

Still, halfway through is a little late to find a book absorbing reading and I'm left wondering, if either Niven or his editor could identify the problem the character-listing was meant to solve, why he didn't simply rework the first part of the book to bring the situation and main character into tight focus right from the beginning. That would have made this book considerably stronger – and might possibly have prevented some of its readers giving up halfway through.

Aspiring sf writers take note: Damon Knight's guide to writing short stories, *Creating Short Fiction* (St Martin's Griffin, \$13.95) has been reissued. The sf field has produced its share of how-to-write books but this is not only the best I've come across, but head and shoulders above its rivals.

Knight is of course a celebrated short-story writer, but experts do not always make the best instructors. As a teacher myself (not of creative writing) I can assure you it's not nearly as easy as it may appear. Unlike many of his competitors – and I can't stress this too much – Knight doesn't



assume that you can already write but instead perceptively details how you might generate ideas and then craft them into stories. He talks about the nature of the subconscious that does most of the work of story creation – he calls his Fred, by the way – and gives some shrewd advice for collaborating with it. He covers the standard topics too, such as character and plotting, but in fresh and insightful ways. He's good on how to write dialogue and sharpen it and gives the clearest exposition of the confusing area of viewpoint I've seen, as well as a very practical look at style. Plus, he provides an annotated version of one of his stories, "Semper Fi" – a page of story faces a page of revealing comments from Knight. Marvellous stuff.

*Babylon 5* has its fans and I've been one from the first season. It had its flaws, though: dialogue that occasionally made me wince, wooden

An interesting element of science fiction is the dialogue between sf writers. Sometimes they read a story that moves them greatly and they want to reply to it, argue with it, or write a footnote to it. It is in this spirit that Gregory Benford has written *Foundation's Fear* (Orbit, £16.99), an exploration of Isaac Asimov's original creation that was voted a Hugo in 1965 as the "Best All-Time Series."

Readers expecting a direct continuation of the Foundation series will be disappointed, yet Asimov himself seemed to satisfactorily conclude the whole series with *Foundation and Earth* (1986). Rather than continue the series on into the future, Asimov then returned to the origins of psychohistory in his later Foundation books. Benford has chosen to follow this route. *Foundation's Fear* centres on Hari Seldon, the founder of psychohistory. Chronologically, the entire novel takes place between Part 1 and Part 2 of *Forward the Foundation* (1993) the last Foundation book Asimov wrote before he died. Part 1 ended with Hari Seldon's horror at the Galactic Emperor commanding him to become the Empire's First Minister, and Part 2 began with Seldon ten years into the job. This jump in the narrative left a gap that Benford did well to spot and exploit.

Going for depth rather than breadth, Benford's ideas about psychohistory and the Laws of Robotics provide a tantalizing glimpse into the way which this new Foundation series will be going – for this is the first book of "The Second Foundation Trilogy."

Benford was approached by Janet



characters (alien ambassadors excepted) and pedestrian episodes leavening the strong ones. Still, even from its rough-diamond beginning there was always the sense that plot and background details were meant to hang together a lot more coherently than is the case with most screen sf. Of course, as a dogged but (be honest) rather apologetic champion for *B-5* back then, I never expected it to get anywhere near as good as it got in the brilliant season three, although even then it still managed to include a selection of downright clunky moments for non-converts to sneer at.

Much of *B-5*'s strength is down to the flowering of that much lauded (and by some out there much derided) five-year arc – and now, in every early episode, you can find lots of what might have seemed throw-away lines on first transmission that have a vastly greater impact.

The arc, love it or loathe it, is also a major reason why *B-5* has, in the UK

at least, become a cult. And for the true believers, there is *Babylon 5: Season by Season: Signs and Portents* by Jane Killick (Boxtree, £7.99), first in a series of guidebooks – presumably there will be at least four although it's still not yet clear if *B-5* will run to five seasons, as J. Michael Straczynski intended, or end with four. This book covers season one in which the seeds of the arc were sown, the programme struggled to find its form and Sinclair was still *B-5*'s commander. Along with a season overview, there's a story summary and comment interspersed with quotes for each episode including the pilot. Except for those with a clinical *B-5* fixation, I can't recommend the book for two reasons: first, because at £7.99 it's way overpriced; and second, because Killick has omitted the basic details of characters, actors, directors etc that is so relevant to her commentaries on each particular episode. Nevertheless, it's an absorbing read and it made me want to sit down and see the entire series all over again. So, when the next volumes in this series roll in, for once I'll be only too delighted to follow the *Interzone* reviewer's code.

Neil Jones

## Deeper Foundations

Nigel Brown

Asimov and the Asimov estate's representative, Ralph Vicinanza, with the idea of writing further novels set in the Foundation universe. He declined at first, but after six months of rumination finally gave in and began this project, along with two other hard sf writers Greg Bear and David Brin. Benford consulted with them as he wrote this novel, and so was able to insert features into this book which, we are told, will have an important bearing later on.

*Foundation's Fear* is structured much like an Asimov novel, with the plot hinging on the political forces which swirl around Hari Seldon as he strives to develop his nascent psychohistory. The most radical departure from Asimov's vision is the introduction of two characters from Earth who form a bridge from our own era into this distant future – a time when even the location of Mankind's homeworld has been forgotten. This alters the flavour of the book, diluting the verisimilitude of a far-future epic down to the feel, in parts, of a near-future technothriller. To be fair, this diminution of scale has been a problem ever since Asi-

mov himself introduced Hari Seldon as a character into the Foundation series, nearly ten years after the first Foundation story was published in *Astounding Science Fiction*. The shift in emphasis from a galaxy-spanning thousand-year plan to the personal problems of Hari Seldon does diminish the vast canvas that the concept was initially painted upon.

On the upside, Benford meets the challenge of integrating 1940s fantasies about hyperspace travel (a plot device) with the demands of hard sf written over 50 years after the original, and presents new ideas which have been grafted seamlessly onto Asimov's world. Introducing virtual reality and software-driven artificial intelligence (not the positronic kind) gives new perspectives about psychohistory and the nature of the Galactic Empire. Doubtless these 1990s innovations will date this book when read in another 50 years time!

I suspect Greg Bear or David Brin will deliver the sequel to *Foundation and Earth*. Benford gives us something better, however: a skilfully portrayed additional depth to the Foundation universe and a laying of the necessary groundwork to carry the story further in the books to follow. As an exercise in sharecropping, *Foundation's Fear* does set the gold standard. It proves there's nothing wrong with perhaps pure commercial motives as a means to this end – to provide an opportunity for that continuing dialogue between science-fiction writers which is one of the pleasures of reading sf.

Nigel Brown

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

**Anderson, Poul. *War of the Gods*.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86315-2, 304pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Historical fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; retelling of a Danish Viking saga.) October 1997.

**Anthony, Piers. *Faun & Games*.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86162-1, 320pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition [?]; proof copy received; the latest "Xanth" novel.) October 1997.

**Applegate, K. A. *The Encounter*.** "Animorphs, 3." Scholastic/Hippo, ISBN 0-590-19354-6, 154pp, B-format paperback, £3.50. (Juvenile sf/horror novel, first published in the USA, 1996.) June 1997.

**Arden, Tom. *The Harlequin's Dance: Book One of The Orokon*.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-40128-1, 447pp, hardcover, cover by Kevin Jenkins, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; the debut book [and first of a five-volume set which the publishers are hoping will enjoy Eddings-like success] by a new Australian-born writer who lives in Brighton.) 9th October 1997.

**Ash, Sarah. *Songspinners*.** Orion/Millennium, ISBN 0-75280-582-7, 325pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1996; it's based on the story "Airs from Another Planet" first published in *Interzone*; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 111.) 2nd June 1997.

**Beere, Peter. *At Gehenna's Door*.** Point Horror, ISBN 0-590-13381-0, 265pp, A-format paperback, £3.50. (Young-adult horror novel, first edition.) June 1997.

**Benford, Gregory. *Matter's End*.** Vista, ISBN 0-575-60072-1, 294pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Eggleton, £5.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1994.) 17th July 1997.

**Brin, David. *The Postman*.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-405-7, 321pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1985; reviewed by Lee

Montgomerie in *Interzone* 20.) 3rd July 1997.

**Brooks, Terry. *Running with the Demon*.** "A novel of Good and Evil." Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-37962-4, 420pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Horror/fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 4th September 1997.

**Bulgakov, Mikhail. *The Master and Margarita*.** Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. "Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-118014-5, xx+412pp, B-format paperback, cover by Kasimir Malevich, £7.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in Russia in 1966-67; this is a new translation, based on a fuller text, of the great Russian fantasy novel [written in the 1930s but unpublished for several decades]; whether it should replace Michael Glenny's translation of 1967, though, is a moot point: it seems to me, based on a comparison of the first few sentences, that the Glenny is still the more readable; this one may have the more reliable text, however.) Late entry: 29th May publication, received in June 1997.

**Burton, LeVar. *Aftermath*.** "A novel of the future." Warner, ISBN 0-446-51993-6, xii+274pp, hardcover, cover by Phil Heffernan, \$22. (Sf novel, first edition; this is a debut book by the actor who [as a teenager] played the young Kunta Kinte in the TV mini-series *Roots* and who later appeared in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*; it has been sent to us by Gollancz/Vista, who are planning a British paperback edition in October — their publicist assures us that, as is not always the case with novels by well-known actors, Burton "really did write this himself"; it comes with cover commendations from Steven Barnes, Ben Bova and Whoopi Goldberg [!].) Late entry: January publication, received in June 1997.

**Canter, Mark. *Down to Heaven*.** Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-66041-4, 326pp, hardcover, cover by Larry Rostant, £16.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first edition [?]; a second outing by the author of the Neanderthal novel *Ember from the Sun* [1995]; editor Nick Austin is acknowledged, so it's possible that, although the author is American, his books originate here in the UK; this one, after the fashion of thriller writers such as Michael Crichton or Nicholas Luard, is on yet

another hoary sf/fantasy theme: the discovery of a lost Chinese city in the South American jungle; who said the lost-race novel is dead? — the recent Tarzan book [see below, under Bur-

roughs and Lansdale] also features a lost civilization.) July 1997.

**Caveney, Philip. *Headline*.** ISBN 0-7472-1942-7, 313pp, hardcover, cover by Steve Crisp, £17.99. (Horror novel, first edition; it's set in Manchester at the approach of the Millennium and features something called "Warp, a new designer hallucinogenic"; is this horror-crime novelist invading Jeff Noon's territory?) 3rd July 1997.

**Cherryh, C. J. *Cloud's Rider*.** New English Library, ISBN 0-340-68912-9, 373pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; a follow-up to the author's previous planetary romance *Rider at the Gate* [1995]; it's possible this one appeared earlier in a Hodder & Stoughton hardcover edition, but if so we didn't receive it.) July 1997.

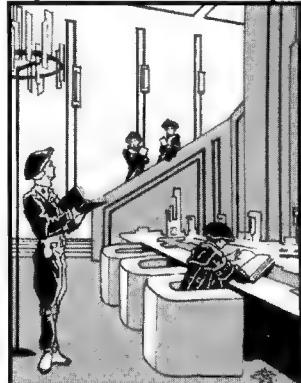
**Cole, Allan. *The Warrior Returns*.** "An epic fantasy of the Anteros." Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-41312-1, 440pp, A-format paperback, cover by Gnemo, \$6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; fourth and last in the series which began with *The Far Kingdoms* by Allan Cole and Chris Bunch.) Late entry: 1st May publication, received in June 1997.

**Corran, Mary. *Darkfell*.** Orion/Millennium, ISBN 0-75280-665-3, 326pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Crisp, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1996; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 112.) 7th July 1997.

**Dann, Joshua. *Timeshare*.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00457-1, 249pp, A-format paperback, cover by Victor Stabin, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; a light adventure, it involves time-travel to 1940s Hollywood and elsewhere; John Wayne and Humphrey Bogart appear as characters; we've not heard of the author before, and the publishers tell us nothing about him; so this may be a debut novel, or it may be by an established writer using a pseudonym; despite the fact that it's set mainly in the USA and contains a fair amount of Ameri-canese, the general tone of the thing suggests to us that the author may be British; he certainly shouldn't be confused with the long-established American sf writer [now living in Australia], Jack Dann.) 1st July 1997.

**Datlow, Ellen, and Terri Windling, eds. *Black Swan, White Raven*.** Avon, ISBN 0-380-97523-8, xi+366pp, hardcover, cover by Thomas Carty, \$23. (Fairy-tale/fantasy anthology, first edition; fourth in the series

## BOOKS RECEIVED



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which began with *Snow White, Blood Red*; it contains all-new tales by Michael Blumlein, John Crowley, Karen Joy Fowler, Harvey Jacobs, Garry Kilworth, Nancy Kress, Pat Murphy, Joyce Carol Oates, Don Webb, Jane Yolen and others.) June 1997.

**Datlow, Ellen, and Terri Windling, eds. *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror: Tenth Annual Collection*.** St Martin's Griffin, ISBN 0-312-15700-2, cviii+524pp, hardcover, cover by Thomas Carty, \$29.95. (Horror/fantasy anthology, first edition; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; yes, you read the above pagination correctly — there are 108 Roman-numbered prefatory pages, with year's summations by the two editors, a media summation by Edward Bryant, a comics round-up, obituaries, etc; the book also contains reprint stories and poems by Michael Bishop, the late Angela Carter, Charles de Lint, Dennis Etchison, Neil Gaiman, Parke Godwin, Garry Kilworth, Tanith Lee, Thomas Ligotti, Patricia A. McKillip, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Joyce Carol Oates, Robert Silverberg, Michael Marshall Smith, Michael Swanwick, Jane Yolen and many others; as ever, an impressive cast.) July 1997.

**Di Filippo, Paul. *Fractal Paisleys*.** Four Walls Eight Windows [39 West 14th St, Room 503, New York, NY 10011, USA], ISBN 1-56858-032-0, 317pp, hardcover, \$20. (Humorous sf collection, first edition; proof copy received; the author's third collection, it contains ten so-called "trailer park science fiction" stories, three of which, "The Double Felix," "Flying the Flannel" and "The Cobain Sweater," first appeared in *Interzone*; two stories are original to

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the book; recommended.)  
20th September 1997.

Donawerth, Jane. **Frankenstein's Daughters: Women Writing Science Fiction**. Syracuse University Press, ISBN 0-8156-0395-9, xxvii+213pp, trade paperback, cover by Frederick A. Wellner, \$16.95. (Critical study of sf by women, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; authors covered include Marion Zimmer Bradley, Octavia Butler, C. J. Cherryh, Ursula Le Guin, Anne McCaffrey, Naomi Mitchison and Mary Shelley, among many others.) No date shown: received in June 1997.

Duane, Diane. **The Book of Night with Moon**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-69328-2, viii+404pp, hardcover, cover by Mick Posen, £17.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; it's described as an "epic fantasy about super-intelligent cats in [the] bestselling tradition of Tad Williams and Terry Pratchett" [not a "tradition" we've heard of before].) 19th July 1997.

Eddings, David and Leigh. **Polograth the Sorceress**. "The companion novel to *Belgarath the Sorcerer*." Voyager, ISBN 0-246-13844-0, 697pp, hardcover, cover by Geoff Taylor, £17.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1997.) 10th July 1997.

Egan, Greg. **Diaspora**. Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-438-2, 295pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous C-format paperback edition [not seen]; about a future solar system of "fleshers" [human beings] and "polises" [intelligent software], it is, in small part, an expansion of the story "Wang's Carpets" which appeared in Greg Bear's anthology *New Legends* [and which, despite its off-putting title, was probably the most admired and discussed story in that book]; the appearance of each new Egan novel is becoming an event in the sf field: this is his fourth, following *Quarantine*, *Permutation City* and *Distress*; a self-contained extract from near the beginning appears in this issue of *Interzone*.) 15th September 1997.

Faust, Joe Clifford. **Bodekker's Demons**. Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-57622-4, 295pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bruce Jensen, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 15th September 1997.

Foster, Alan Dean. **The Howling Stones: A Novel of the Commonwealth**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-488-X, 330pp, hardcover, cover by Bob Eggleton, £16.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1997; the latest in the "Humanx Commonwealth" series of adventures which began with Foster's first published novel, *The Tar-Aiyim Krang*, in 1972.) 3rd July 1997.

Fowler, Christopher. **Disturbia**. Warner, ISBN 0-7515-1910-3, 342pp, B-format paperback, cover(s) by Jay Eff, £7.99. (Horror novel, first edition; like Fowler's last two novels, *Spanky* and *Psychoville*, this book is strikingly designed, with a detachable dust-jacket.) 3rd July 1997.

Gabaldon, Diana. **Drums of Autumn**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-96431-3, xi+1185pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Timeslip romance, first published in the USA, 1997; sequel to *Cross Stitch*, *Dragonfly in Amber* and *Voyager*; the books in this Scottish-flavoured series seem to get bigger and bigger: this volume alone is almost 1,200 pages; apparently the American author, who has a PhD in zoology, was inspired to begin her writing by an episode of *Doctor Who*; in fact, Gabaldon comes across as quite fannish in her three pages of acknowledgments, advertising her web page and giving thanks to Jack Whyte, among many others [presumably the same Jack Whyte who writes the Arthurian novels: see listing last issue]; she also thanks "members of the UK Forum, for a riveting discussion of the RAF's underpants, circa WWI" and "members of the Compuserve SFLIT Forum, for the publication dates of *Conan the Barbarian*"; opening the book at random, one soon finds sentences which might be worthy of inclusion in Thog's Masterclass, belly division: "Her insides clenched tight, making lumps and knots of the food she'd eaten" [p900]; "A small icy doubt dropped into her stomach, to join the other cold weights that lay there, like a collection of ball bearings" [p901].) 3rd July 1997.

Gaiman, Neil. **The Wake**. "The Sandman." Illustrated by Michael Zulli and others. Introduction by Mikal Gilmore. Titan, ISBN 1-85286-807-4, 192pp, trade paperback, cover by Dave McKean, £12.99. (Fantasy graphic novel, first published in comic-book format in the USA, 1996; there was a limited-edition hardcover in February 1997, which we did not see; the tenth and last "Sandman" book, it comes with a sheet of commendations from the likes of Stephen King and, gulp, Norman Mailer [the latter states: "Sandman is a comic strip for intellectuals, and I say it's about time."] 11th July 1997.

Kanal, Michael. **Thoughts of God**. "A metaphysical novel of murder." Ace, ISBN 0-441-00466-0, 311pp, C-format paperback, cover by David S. Rheinhardt, \$12. (Sf novel, first edition; a debut by a new American writer.) 1st July 1997.

Katzenbach, John. **State of Mind**. Little, Brown, ISBN 0-

Hamilton, Peter F. **A Quantum Murder**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85954-6, 352pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1994; proof copy received; reviewed by Andrew Tidmarsh in *Interzone* 87.) November 1997.

Hughes, Stuart. **Ocean Eyes**. Peeping Tom Books [4 Pottery Close, Belper, Derbyshire DE56 0HU], ISBN 0-9530016-0-1, viii+114pp, small-press paperback, cover by Madeleine Finnegan, £4. (Horror/fantasy collection, first edition; the first book to be published under the aegis of the small-press magazine *Peeping Tom*, it's nicely produced; it's also the debut book of this new British author [born 1965]; it has cover commendations from Mark Chadbourn, Simon Clark and Stephen Gallagher.) No date shown: received in June 1997.

Jacobs, Harvey. **American Goliath: Inspired by the True, Incredible Events Surrounding the Mysterious Marvel Known to an Astonished World as The Cardiff Giant**. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-16771-7, 346pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Historical fantasy [?] novel, first edition; proof copy received; it comes with cover commendations from Jack Dann and Michael Moorcock [it's a "full-scale, full-strength, all-American fable," says the latter, "the best novel of a very fine writer"].) 18th August 1997.

Jefferies, Mike. **Threads of Magic**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648262-7, 337pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a follow-up to *The Knights of Cawdor* and *Citadel of Shadows* in the author's long-running "Loremasters of Elundium" series.) 30th June 1997.

Jones, Diana Wynne. **Deep Secret**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06479-X, 383pp, hardcover, cover by Peter Mennim, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; by the author that a *Locus* reviewer has dubbed "A British National Treasure"; the hero is called Rupert Venables and part of the action is set at a science-fiction convention, so it's probably humorous.) 6th November 1997.

Kanal, Michael. **Thoughts of God**. "A metaphysical novel of murder." Ace, ISBN 0-441-00466-0, 311pp, C-format paperback, cover by David S. Rheinhardt, \$12. (Sf novel, first edition; a debut by a new American writer.) 1st July 1997.

Katzenbach, John. **State of Mind**. Little, Brown, ISBN 0-

316-64089-1, 530pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1997; proof copy received; a sixth novel by the praised author of *Just Cause*, *The Shadow Man* and other thrillers.) December 1997.

Kelly, James Patrick. **Think Like a Dinosaur and Other Stories**. Foreword by John Kessel. Golden Gryphon Press [364 West Country Lane, Collinsville, IL 62234, USA], ISBN 0-9655901-94, xii+275pp, hardcover, cover by Bob Eggleton, \$22.95. (Sf collection, first edition; it contains 14 stories, almost all of them reprinted from Asimov's SF Magazine; the title story won a 1996 Hugo Award; this is the first book to be published by James Turner's new Golden Gryphon Press, a sort of breakaway from Arkham House – more exactly, Jim Turner was kicked out by Arkham's owners [the August Derleth estate] for the sin of publishing too much sf [rather than supernatural horror], and so he has set up this imprint to publish the books he would have published if he were still running Arkham's list; as a result, it's an Arkham House-lookalike product, very nicely put together.) 18th August 1997.

Kerr, Katharine, and Mark Kreighbaum. **Palace: A Novel of the Pinch**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648263-5, 437pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA [?], 1996.) 21st July 1997.

Kilworth, Garry. **A Midsummer Night's Nightmare**. Illustrations by Stephen Player. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14464-9, 325pp, A-format paperback, cover by John Howe, £5.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1996; a sequel of sorts to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, involving the Bard's fairy characters; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 116.) 10th July 1997.

King, Stephen. **Desperation**. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-65428-7, 720pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Moore, £6.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1996; reviewed by Pete Crowther in *Interzone* 113.) 17th July 1997.

Lawhead, Stephen. **Byzantium**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648251-1, x+646pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mick Posen, £6.99. (Historical fantasy novel, first published in 1996.) 30th June 1997.

McAlpine, Duncan, with John Skoulides, eds. **The Comic Book Price Guide 1997/98 Edition**. "Fully revised and

expanded." Titan, ISBN 1-85286-794-9, 796pp, C-format paperback, £14.99. (Illustrated price guide to UK and US comics [many of them of sf, fantasy or horror interest]; the first edition appeared about a decade ago, and this massive tome is the eighth; it's the first time we've seen one of these volumes: for those of us who are not interested in buying or selling comics it may have limited value, but is likely to be of use as a sort of universal catalogue of comics; the redoubtable Steve Holland is credited on the title page as "Editor (British Section).") 24th July 1997.

McAuley, Paul J. **Child of the River: The First Book of Confluence**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06427-7, 286pp, hardcover, cover by Paul Young, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; set in the very far future, it is the opening volume of McAuley's first-ever trilogy.) 11th September 1997.

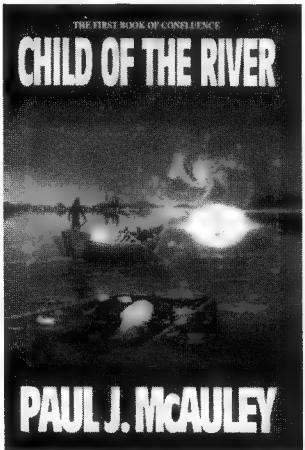
McCaffrey, Anne. **Red Star Rising**. "The Second Chronicles of Pern." Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14272-7, 416pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Weston, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1996; it has since appeared in the USA as *Dragonseye* – presumably Del Rey Books didn't want a new Pern novel with a title sounding like some long-lost work of Soviet sf.) 10th July 1997.

Moorcock, Michael. **Legends from the End of Time**. "The Tale of the Eternal Champion, Vol. 11." Orion/Millennium, ISBN 0-75280-649-1, 404pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Reeve, £6.99. (Sf/fantasy omnibus, first published in 1993; an earlier volume of the same title was published in 1976, but that contained only three novellas – "Pale Roses," "White Stars" and "Ancient Shadows"; this much larger omnibus edition also contains the novel "Constant Fire" [formerly *The Transformation of Miss Mavis Ming*, UK 1977; also known as *A Messiah at the End of Time*, USA 1978] and the novella "Elric at the End of Time" [1984]; there's a two-page preface by the author in which he mentions his debt to George Meredith and to the aesthetes of the 1890s; this volume is new to us: we were not sent a review copy of the hardcover back in 1993; like the related trilogy, *The Dancers at the End of Time* [1972-76], it's one of Moorcock's more enjoyable works: recommended.) 2nd June 1997.

Morris, Mark. **Longbarrow**. Piatkus, ISBN 0-7499-0385-6,

442pp, hardcover, cover by Sam Hadley, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition; the author's sixth novel.) June 1997.

Morris, Mark. **Mr Bad Face**. Piatkus, ISBN 0-7499-3022-5, 432pp, A-format paperback, cover by Sam Hadley, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1996; the author's fifth novel, we missed this one in hardcover; it's good to be back on the Piatkus mailing list and to learn that Mark Morris is still publishing; the same publisher also produced a collection of his short stories which we missed a couple of years ago – *Close to the Bone*.) June 1997.



Nichols, Adam. **The Pathless Way**. Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-316-5, 407pp, A-format paperback, cover by Kenson Low, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1996; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 117.) 7th July 1997.

Niles, Douglas. **Darkenheight**. "Book Two of the Watershed Trilogy." Ace, ISBN 0-441-00456-3, 466pp, A-format paperback, cover by Ciruelo Cabral, \$6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; the first in the series, which we didn't see, was entitled *A Breach in the Watershed*; Niles is yet another writer who has "escaped" from the once-lucrative TSR gaming-fantasy stable [DragonLance, "Forgotten Realms," etc]; former stablemates Margaret Weis and R. A. Salvatore commend him.) 1st July 1997.

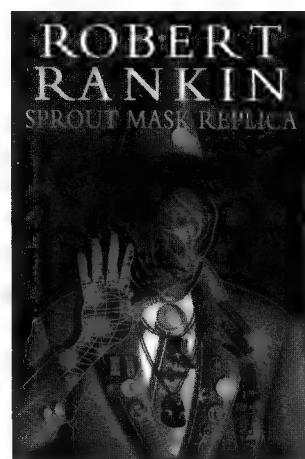
Niven, Larry. **The Ringworld Throne**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-41296-6, viii+355pp, A-format paperback, cover by Barclay Shaw, \$6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; a belated sequel to *Ringworld* [1970] and *Ringworld Engineers* [1979]; reviewed by Neil Jones in *Interzone* 111.) Late entry: 1st May publication, received in June 1997.

Powers, Tim. **Earthquake Weather**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-

86163-X, 414pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1997; proof copy received; the American cover-copy tells us that it's a sequel to the author's last novel, *Expiration Date* – a fact that the British publishers didn't mention, perhaps because Powers has moved, between books, from HarperCollins/Voyager to Random House/Legend.) October 1997.

Pullman, Philip. **The Golden Compass: His Dark Materials, Book One**. Introduction by Terry Brooks. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-41335-0, xii+351pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK as *Northern Lights*, 1995; this is the book that a number of *Interzone*'s letter-writers have been praising to the skies – published in Britain as a children's novel but in America re-packaged for adults; Del Rey have commissioned a new intro by Brooks to convince a wider readership to give it a try; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *IZ* 110.) Late entry: 1st May publication, received in June 1997.

Rankin, Robert. **Sprout Mask Replica**. Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-40706-8, 252pp, hardcover, cover by Ian Murray, £16.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; there is now an "official Robert Rankin fan club" called Sproutlore – based, perhaps appropriately, in Dublin: there are details in the back of the book.) June (?) 1997.

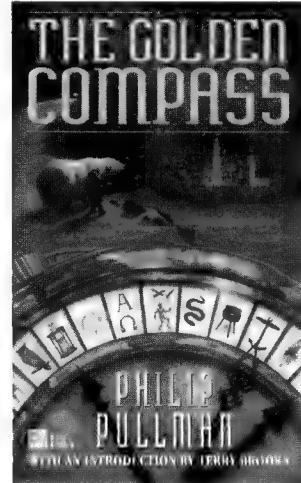


Rawn, Melanie. **The Mageborn Traitor: Exiles, Book Two**. Macmillan, ISBN 0-333-65032-8, 758pp, hardcover, cover by Michael Whelan, £17.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997.) 8th August 1997.

Reed, Robert. **Beneath the Gated Sky**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86269-5, 348pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; sequel to *Beyond the Veil of Stars*.) September 1997.

Rose, Malcolm. **Circle of Nightmares**. Point, ISBN 0-590-13383-7, 266pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steinar Lund, £3.50. (Young-adult sf/horror novel, first edition.) June 1997.

Rusch, Kristine Kathryn. **The Fey: Changeling**. Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-75280-991-1, 514pp, A-format paperback, cover by David O'Connor, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996.) 2nd June 1997.



Salvatore, R. A. **The Demon Awakens**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-39149-7, 515pp, hardcover, cover by Myles Pinkney, \$24. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) Late entry: 1st May publication, received in June 1997.

Saul, John. **The Blackstone Chronicles, Part 6: Asylum**. "The serial thriller concludes!" Fawcett Crest, ISBN 0-449-22794-4, 97pp, A-format paperback, \$3.99. (Horror novella, first edition.) 1st July 1997.

Schweitzer, Darrell. **Poetica Dementia: Being a Further Accumulation of Metrical Offenses**. Illustrated by Thomas Brown. Zadok Allen: Publisher [i.e. the author, 113 Deepdale Rd, Strafford, PA 19087-2627, USA], no ISBN shown, 26pp, stapled pamphlet, \$4. (Humorous horror/fantasy verse collection, first edition; it's dedicated "to the memory of H. P. Lovecraft and William McGonagall, poets" – which gives you the flavour of the thing!) No date shown: received in June 1997.

Silverberg, Robert. **Ringing the Changes: The Collected Stories of Robert Silverberg, Volume Five**. Voyager, ISBN 0-586-21373-2, 359pp, B-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £6.99. (Sf collection, first edition; this would appear to complete the non-chronological set of the author's best short stories: it contains pieces mainly from the 1960s,



with copious new authorial notes; in his introduction Silverberg tells us that he has now written some 24 million published words – “which puts me up there with

Simenon and John Creasey and a few other very prolific writers.” 21st July 1997.

Smith, Michael Marshall. **Spares**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21775-4, 305pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; Smith’s second novel, this is essentially sf [with elements of crime and horror], although it’s not included in the publisher’s “Voyager” list; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in *Interzone* 117.) 17th July 1997.

Stapledon, William Olaf. **An Olaf Stapledon Reader**. Edited by Robert Crossley. Syracuse University Press, ISBN 0-8156-0430-0, xxi+314pp, trade paperback, cover by Frederick A. Wellner, \$17.95. (Sf and non-fiction collection, first edition; there is a simultaneous hard-cover edition [not seen]; this very useful volume collects a good deal of the more obscure work by one of the greatest writers of the “mainstream,” non-genre, sf tradition; his novella *The Flames* is reproduced in its entirety, as is the short story [originally published as a very slim book] *Old Man in New World*; there are also extracts from *Last and First Men*, *Last Men in London*, *Star Maker* and *Darkness and the Light*; and there is a generous selection of Stapledon’s non-fiction, letters and poems, some of which have never appeared in book form before; there are cover commendations by Arthur C. Clarke and Doris Lessing; all in all, highly recommended to more scholarly readers.) No date shown: received in June 1997.

Starhawk. **The Fifth Sacred Thing**. Thorsons, ISBN 0-7225-3502-3, 699pp, A-format paperback, cover by Keith Batchellor, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1993; the publishers classify it as “science fiction/spiritual fiction,” but a better label might be New Age SF; it’s copyright “Miriam Simos,” which presumably is Starhawk’s real name; the author lives in San Francisco, and was already well-known for her uplifting non-fiction [with titles like *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*] before the appearance of this, her first, novel; Marion Zimmer Bradley, Ernest Callenbach [author of *Ecotopia*] and Daniel Quinn [author of the award-winning *Ishmael*] all commend it, and *Library Journal* is quoted to the effect that “this strong debut fits

well among feminist futuristic, utopic, and dystopic works by the likes of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Ursula Le Guin, and Margaret Atwood.”) 18th August 1997.

Starhawk. **Walking to Mercury**. Thorsons, ISBN 0-7225-3501-5, vi+489pp, A-format paperback, cover by Robert Hunt, £6.99. (Sf [?] novel, first published in the USA, 1997; the author’s second novel, judging by the page count this would appear to be shorter than her first, to which it is a prequel, but for some reason it’s set in much smaller print; it’s not entirely clear whether this book is sf [although the publishers do label it as such]: it looks as though it’s more of an autobiographical novel of 20th-century hippy/New Age life; Starhawk writes well, if preachily.) 18th August 1997.

Stine, R. L. **Bad Hare Day**. “Goosebumps, 41.” Scholastic/Hippo, ISBN 0-590-19324-4, 118pp, B-format paperback, £3.50. (Juvenile horror novel, first published in the USA, 1996; it’s copyright “Parachute Press, Inc.”) June 1997.

Swanwick, Michael. **Jack Faust**. Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-517-6, 325pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf/historical fantasy novel, first edition [?]; there is a simultaneous C-format paperback edition [not seen]; a retelling of the Faust legend, this looks to be a major work; it carries a recommendation from William Gibson: “madly ambitious and brilliantly executed, recasting the entire history of science in a wholly original version of our culture’s central myth of knowledge, power and sorrow.”) 15th September 1997.

Turtledove, Harry. **The Thousand Cities: Book Three of The Time of Troubles**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38049-5, 404pp, A-format paperback, cover by Michael Herring, \$6.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; third in a new “Videssos” trilogy, following on from “The Videssos Cycle” [four books] and “The Tale of Krispos” [three books].) 1st June 1997.

Vevers, Marian. **Bloodlines**. Vista, ISBN 0-575-60057-8, 270pp, A-format paperback, cover by Dan Crisp and Terry Pastor, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1996.) 10th July 1997.

Waugh, Mark. **Come**. Pulp Books [i.e. Pulp Faction, PO Box 12171, London N19 3HB], ISBN 1-901072-03-7, 126pp, small-press paperback with accompanying music CD, £11.50. (“Slipstream” sf novel,

first edition; it has something to do with “Dolly Savage ... an inflatable doll who becomes a cult movie star and international icon of cool”; the author [born 1963], a well-known “club promoter and media mercenary,” lives in Brighton.) 12th July 1997.

Weiss, Dan. **Diplodiniers**. Black Plankton Press [PO Box 1351, Cobb, CA 95426, USA], no ISBN shown, 102pp, small-press paperback, cover by Rick Potts, \$7. (Humorous sf novella, first edition; you can check out this energetic self-publishing Californian at his web-site: <http://pages.prodigy.com/bplankton>.) June 1997.

Weiss, Dan. **Mood Shifts**. Revised edition. Black Plankton Press [PO Box 1351, Cobb, CA 95426, USA], no ISBN shown, 216pp, small-press paperback, cover by Rick Potts, \$10. (Humorous sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; the author’s friends have said things like “a combination of *Monty Python*, 1984, and Philip K. Dick.”) June 1997.

Westfahl, Gary. **Cosmic Engineers: A Study of Hard Science Fiction**. “Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Number 67.” Greenwood Press, ISBN 0-313-29727-4, xii+148pp, hardcover, £39.95. (Critical study of the named type of sf; first published in the USA, 1996; this is the American edition with a British price, distributed in the UK by Eurospan, 3 Henrietta St, London WC2E 8LU; as we said last month, with respect to his near-simultaneously published Borgo Press book *Islands in the Sky: The Space Station Theme in SF*, Westfahl is one of the liveliest and most readable of the newer American academic critics; “Hard SF” is a good topic for investigation: this study breaks the ground, with a detailed history of the term and a survey of novels by Hal Clement, Arthur C. Clarke and Charles Sheffield; recommended.) Late entry: 1996 publication, received in June 1997.

Williamson, Philip G. **Orbus’s World: Enchantment’s Edge, Volume 2**. New English Library, ISBN 0-340-68224-8, 364pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jon Sullivan, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; the first volume in this series, *The Orb and the Spectre*, appeared in hardcover from Hodder & Stoughton in 1996: if they have done a hardcover of this second volume, we never received it; nor have we seen a paperback of the first.) 17th July 1997.

Wilson, Robin Scott, ed. **Paragons: Twelve Master**

**Science Fiction Writers Ply Their Craft**. St Martin’s Griffin, ISBN 0-312-15623-5, xiii+368pp, trade paperback, \$14.95. (Sf anthology, first published in the USA, 1996; an annotated “how-to” anthology, it contains reprint stories by Greg Bear, Pat Cadigan, Nancy Kress, Pat Murphy, Kim Stanley Robinson, Lucius Shepard, Bruce Sterling, Howard Waldrop and others; Sterling’s article “A Workshop Lexicon” is reprinted from *Interzone* as an appendix; reviewed by Ken Brown in *IZ 109*.) Late entry: 18th May publication, received in June 1997.

Wingrove, David. **The Marriage of the Living Dark: Chung Kuo, Book Eight**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-450-56419-3, xxiii+455pp, hardcover, cover by Tim White, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition; the final novel in this massive [two million-word] series about a Chinese-dominated future.) July 1997.

Wright, Ronald. **A Scientific Romance**. Anchor, ISBN 1-862-30011-9, 309pp, C-format paperback, £9.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; this is a debut work of fiction by a highly-regarded British-born travel writer [now resident in Canada], described by its publishers as “a powerful, witty satire in the tradition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the Victorian *fin-de-siècle* romances”; critic D. J. Taylor is roped in to dub it “a mesmerising account of time-travel which combines graceful gestures to genre-definers such as H. G. Wells and Richard Jefferies with a thoroughly modern love story”; as usual with these efforts by mainstreamers [see my editorial article in *Interzone* 116], the dread term science fiction passes nobody’s lips, but it looks to be an interesting work; “Anchor” is a new quality-fiction [i.e. snob-back] imprint of Transworld Publishers.) 11th September 1997.

Ziewe, Jürgen. **New Territories: The Computer Visions of Jürgen Ziewe**. Text by Nigel Suckling. Paper Tiger, ISBN 0-1-85028-407-5, 128pp, very large-format paperback, £14.99. (Collection of computer-generated sf/fantasy art; first edition; the German-born artist lives in West Sussex, and much of his colourful New-Agey work, which has a look of latter-day 1960s psychedelia, has appeared on posters; “Paper Tiger” is now an imprint name of Collins & Brown, since the original parent company, Dragon’s World, went bust.) 16th June 1997.

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1997

Ashdown, Richard, and Tim Massey, eds. **The Art of Queen: The Eye**. "The making of an unparalleled computer action game." Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-0376-2, 160pp, very large-format paperback, £15.99.

(Heavily colour-illustrated companion to the sf/fantasy game produced by the rock-music band Queen; first edition; it includes a CD-ROM sampler; game-designer Ashdown would seem to be the primary creator of this "world," which, the book says, has taken "a 22-man team 33 man-years to put together" [which suggests no women were involved, although in fact some female forenames do crop up in the acknowledgments]; see also the novelization listed below, under Paul Darrow.) *5th September 1997*.

Burroughs, Edgar Rice, and Joe R. Lansdale. **Tarzan: The Lost Adventure**. Preface by George T. McWhorter. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-41273-7, ix+257pp, A-format paperback, cover by Raymond Verdaguer, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1995; the first edition came out in a four-part, graphic novel, pseudo-pulp-magazine format from Dark Horse Comics; this book edition retains a few interior illustrations by Gary Gianni and others; it's based on an 80-page manuscript fragment that Burroughs wrote before his death in 1950; unfortunately, the preface by ERB scholar and librarian McWhorter doesn't tell us what we really want to know — namely, exactly which bits are by Burroughs and what liberties Lansdale took with them; but, judging from the feel of the thing, there is much more of Lansdale here than there is of ERB [the style is more tough, clipped and slangy than Burroughs's, and there are a number of Texan and science-fictional in-references which could only have come from Lansdale: e.g., the heroine has studied anthropology in Texas under "Professor Chad Oliver"]; a lost Burroughs masterpiece it ain't, but for old-time ERB fans it's still an item to have; Del Rey Books have also published *Tarzan: The Epic Adventures* by R. A. Salvatore, a novelization of the recent US TV series of the same name; perhaps the appearance of these two books, the first such to be authorized since Fritz Leiber's movie novelization *Tarzan and the Valley of Gold* in 1966, means that the Burroughs estate is at long last unfreezing its hitherto strictly prohibitive attitude towards the literary exploitation of Tarzan's name.) *1st June 1997*.

Darrow, Paul. **The Novel of Queen: The Eye**. "Based on the unparalleled computer action game." Boxtree, ISBN 0-

## Spinoffery

This is a list of all books received that fall into those sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror which may be termed novelizations, recursive fictions, spinoffs, sequels by other hands, shared worlds and sharecrops (including non-fiction about shared worlds, films and TV, etc.). The collective term "Spinoffery" is used for the sake of brevity.

7522-0371-1, 408pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Sf/fantasy game novelization, first edition [?]; it's copyright "1996 Queen Productions Limited" — which is a reference to the rock group called Queen.) *5th September 1997*.

David, Peter. **House of Cards**. "Star Trek: New Frontier, Book One." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-01395-5, 168pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1997; this is the American first edition with a British price added; it's the first of a new sub-series of "Trek" novels which is tag-lined: "A new ship, a new crew, a new mission!... New Frontier concept by John J. Ordover and Peter David.") *July 1997*.

David, Peter. **Into the Void**. "Star Trek: New Frontier, Book Two." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-01396-3, 151pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1997; this is the American first edition with a British price added; these "New Frontier" books are quite short, and each ends with the words "To be continued," so presumably they constitute an ongoing serial rather than a series.) *July 1997*.

Drennan, Kathryn M. **To Dream in the City of Sorrows**. "Babylon 5, Book #9." Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-2354-2, xii+337pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1997; inspired by the Warner Bros. series created by J. Michael Straczynski; this one, the fattest B-5 novel so far, actually contains an introduction by JMS in which he implicitly disowns the earlier spinoff novels and claims that, "this is the very first one that is considered canonical in every small detail... What you hold in your hand is an official, authorized chapter in the Babylon 5 storyline"; well, that puts all those other hacks in their place; it's Drennan's debut novel, although she has already published short stories and written several TV scripts — including one for *Babylon 5*, natch.) *25th July 1997*.

Edwards, Ted. **X-Files Confidential: Episode Guide to Series One**. Foreword by Jeff Rice. Little, Brown, ISBN 0-

7515-2139-6, xx+200pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Lightly illustrated unofficial companion to the sf/horror TV series created by Chris Carter; first published in the USA, 1996.) *11th July 1997*.

Hearn, Marcus, and Alan Barnes. **The Hammer Story**. Foreword by Christopher Lee. Titan, ISBN 1-85286-790-6, 192pp, hardcover, £24.99. (Copiously illustrated, large-format history and filmography of the British film company which became so identified with sf/horror/fantasy movies in the period 1955-75; first edition; it's copyright "Hammer Film Productions.") *26th June 1997*.

Jones, Matthew. **Beyond the Sun**. "The New Adventures." Virgin, ISBN 0-426-20511-1, 295pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Salwowski, £4.99. (Shared-universe sf novel, featuring the spacefaring adventures of Bernice Summerfield [a former associate of Doctor Who's]; first edition.) *17th July 1997*.

Lumley, Brian. **Brian Lumley's Mythos Omnibus, Volume II: Spawn of the Winds, In the Moons of Borea, Elysia**. "The three concluding novels in the epic Titus Crow saga." HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-649938-4, 684pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Horror omnibus, first edition; it consists of pastiche Lovecraftiana, partaking of the shared "Cthulhu Mythos" orchestrated after Lovecraft's death by August Derleth; the three novels first appeared in the USA in 1978, 1979 and 1989.) *30th June 1997*.

Muir, John Kenneth. **Exploring Space 1999: An Episode Guide and Complete History of the Mid-1970s Science Fiction Television Series**. McFarland [distributed in Britain by Shelwing Ltd, 4 Pleydel Gdns, Folkestone, Kent CT20 2DN], ISBN 0-7864-0165-6, ix+212pp, hardcover, £32.85.

(Lightly illustrated guide to the sf TV series created by Gerry and Sylvia Anderson; first published in the USA, 1997; this is the

American edition with a British price added; there have been a million books on *Star Trek*, so it's not surprising that lesser sf shows of broadly similar stamp should eventually attract book-length studies too; the author of this one [born 1969] seems pretty defensive in the face of the superior *Star Trek* phenomenon, and he's got a lot to be defensive about — *Space: 1999* was roundly execrated by most British sf fans at the time of its first showing; still, if you were very young at the time, as this author was, it may have had a deep and lasting impact on you...) *21st August 1997*.

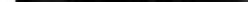
Richards, Thomas. **Star Trek in Myth and Legend**. Orion, ISBN 0-75280-799-4, vi+180pp, hardcover, £14.99. ("Literary" study of the sf TV series and its spinoffs; first edition; described in the blurb as a book which "will become the Trekkers' bible," at first glance this looks like yet more sub-Joseph Campbell mytho-religious tripe, but then one notices that the author, a former Harvard University lecturer, has previously written a couple of serious works, *The Commodity Culture in Victorian Britain* [1990] and *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* [1993]; this latter contained an amazing chapter which discussed books by Lewis Carroll, Bram Stoker and J. G. Ballard, as I recall), so maybe it's worth a longer look...) *16th June 1997*.

Sherman, Josephine, and Susan Schwart. **Vulcan's Forge**. "Star Trek." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-00926-5, 343pp, hardcover, cover by Keith Birdsong, £12.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1997; this is the American first edition with a British price on the cover; it belongs in the growing *Star Trek* sub-genre of "Spock" novels.) *August 1997*.

Singer, Michael. **Batman & Robin: The Making of the Movie**. Titan, ISBN 1-85286-836-8, 128pp, very large-format paperback, £8.99. (Copiously illustrated souvenir book of the latest "Batman" film; first published in the USA [?], 1997; it's copyright DC Comics.) *27th June 1997*.



Stone, Dave. **Ship of Fools**. "The New Adventures." Virgin, ISBN 0-426-20510-3, 248pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jon Sullivan, £4.99. (Shared-universe sf novel, featuring the spacefaring adventures of Bernice Summerfield [a former associate of Doctor Who's]; first edition.) *21st August 1997*.



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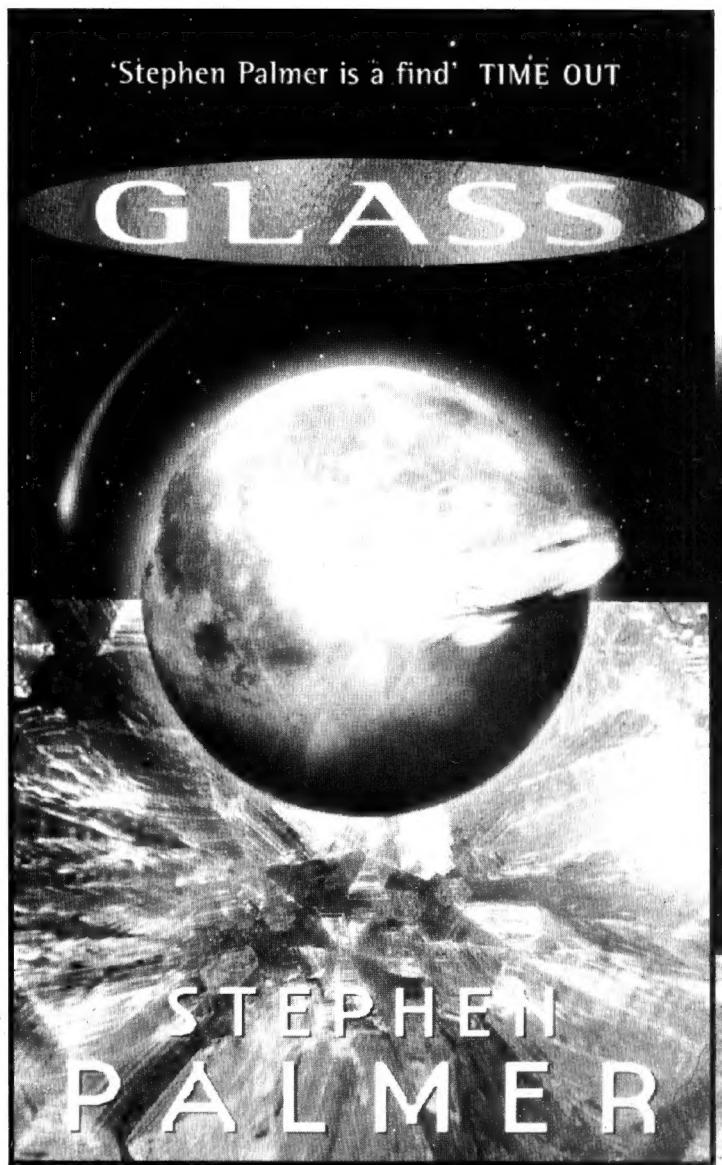
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